SCREEN

incorporating screen education

8211.7578

INDEPENDENT FILM

EDITORIAL

This issue on independent cinema groups together a number of statements coming from different positions within the independent sector. It does not intend to provide a 'survey' of the sector as whole, as the diversity of practices and theoretical positions is such that no representative overview can be constructed. It is hoped that points raised within articles and by the divergences between them will generate debate to be continued in future numbers of *Screen*. Perhaps we can outline some of these issues in this editorial:

The early '70s established the material base for a growth in British arts funding through institutions like Regional Arts Associations, the British Film Institute and the Arts Council. The Independent Film-Makers Association which was founded at this time included teachers, journalists, distributors and exhibitors as well as film-makers under the umbrella of a broad cultural project influenced, on one hand, by the semiotic and modernist theory of the late '60s and on the other, by progressive social and political movements such as feminism. The IFA (now the Independent Film and Video Makers Association) also argued and organised for more funding and recognition for this sector and won increased institutional support. The increase in state support and grant aid also led film-makers to defend their economic and contractual interests through trade union membership. However, just as the independent sector's relationship with the ACTT was being consolidated, the election of a Tory government signalled the end of this expansionist trend, inaugurating an era of cuts and freezes in spending.

With the advent of Channel Four in 1981, hopes of expansion began to revive. Yet after a brief period of growth, the situation again appears static and the pool of independent film-makers who desire to make a living out of their work are compelled to compete fiercely for the available funding. These new professionals inevitably attempt to protect their own interests; those in workshops argue for job security and have their own organisation, the National Organisation of Workshops, while those who work freelance or in small independent companies compete for commissions from Channel Four or BFI funding in order to survive. There is little room for new film-makers in such a fiercely contested space. Richard Woolley takes up this problem in his polemic on access and the necessity for creating resources for those whose work is not necessarily in line with the criteria of funding bodies, while the discussion on training also deals with the problems for new film-makers in entering the independent sector. Sue Aspinall looks at how the strategies of funding bodies affect independent work, leading from practical and political considerations to an argument for a modern Brechtian film and television practice.

One question raised by the new 'venues' for independent production (television and the commercial art market of cinema chains and festival screenings) is that of address. The idea of a 'range of practices' embodied in the early stages of the IFA project was based on the concept that aesthetic and political intervention should be directed and formed by the particular cultural and historical context. The notion of address was crucial to these ideas as it articulated the intention to construct representations which called upon particular knowledges and

experiences in its spectators, in order to engender a critical understanding of the way these are formed in their relation to an analysis of systems of signification. This implied constructing films with particular screening situations in mind, along with distribution and exhibition practices (programming contexts, programming notes, presentations and, most importantly, discussions) that deviated from conventional screening patterns based on consumption and instead reflected the particular audience groupings and were tailored to the specific and complex histories of their social identities.

Many film-makers who are funded by the major sources have switched to narrative feature-length films, employing strategies which seem to cater to the notion of accessibility to a mass audience rather than constructing a specific address that acknowledges a particular aspect of social experience which determines an individual's histories. While not expecting film-making to address *only* one category of experience and social identity, the impulse to lead away from a specific address may mean that films do not make clear *the terms through which they speak,* and this makes it more difficult for the spectator to take up an analytical position in relation to the material.

The theoretical standpoints informing different independent practices have remained divided since their first inceptions. Platform provides an articulate exposition of a stance that seems to be based in late '60s class politics, disavowing the complex arguments which have been developed in the last twenty years (including those which have appeared in the pages of *Screen*) concerning the politics of representation. Peter Gidal's piece argues from the position of Structural Materialist film theory that has not substantially changed since the early '70s. And, as Sue Aspinall argues, much film practice linked with Brechtian theory could be said to employ it in a prescriptive and unresponsive way.

'Postmodernism' is one development which has taken up the theoretical terms of modernism and attempted to instigate representations which address political and cultural questions. Abigail Solomon Godeau's article is important in this respect. Although primarily referring to photographic work, it provides a coherent examination of the theoretical terms of postmodernist practice which spans work taking place across film and video as well as photography and painting. One may question the aesthetic principles of a project which 'moves beyond' modernist disciplines. What is the specific formal characteristic of postmodernism and how are these realities to be interrogated in relation to form? Do modernist devices (used as techniques rather than reflecting on the nature of form itself?) suffice to overwhelm the cultural loading of representation which have, through the dominance of certain forms of conventional signification, powerful effects through both conscious and unconscious mechanisms? Is it possible, by making more obvious the code which structure such representations, to overturn these mechanisms and form a truly subversive critique?

In opposition to this stance, Gidal's lucid restatement of an extreme position in terms of theoretical practice demonstrates how feminist theory has influenced the premises of the avant-garde. Lisa Cartwright also takes this up, and her feminist critique of Jonathan Rosenbaum's new study of the field reveals the avant-garde as an heterogeneous area whose practices – like that of independent film generally – invite debate.

This issue marks the departure of SEFT's Business Manager, Ann Sachs. The members of the Editorial Board wish to record their thanks for her many services on behalf of *Screen* and the Society.

(THE ISSUE EDITORS: SUE ASPINALL, ROD STONEMAN, GILLIAN SWANSON)

'TRAINING' THE INDEPENDENTS

A GROUP OF FILM-MAKERS, FUNDERS AND TEACHERS DISCUSS THE IMPACT OF EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES ON THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR

THIS DISCUSSION of film-making education is intended to focus attention on the institutions and the relatively invisible practices which stand behind independent film-making in Britain. Although they are rarely discussed at length, such educational strategies are crucial to the development and extension of the sector – importantly influencing both access to the medium and the terms of the films produced. We set out the admittedly partial agenda here with the intention of inviting retort, argument and the expansion of these areas of discussion.

Inevitably, a large part of it focuses on independent film and video workshops and the politics of access, an increasingly central issue as the independent sector begins to accrue increased financial backing. We cannot ignore the effect this has on its social and cultural roles. Has the recently increased support of state funding bodies and Channel Four produced a new layer of professionals more progressive in intention but equally remote and exclusive in function? Should the burden for basic instruction in the use of equipment be removed from those production groups now receiving funds to act as 'access workshops'? If workshops are not able to provide this rudimentary training, what other possibilities exist for individuals (in this respect, *most* people in this country are more or less 'disadvantaged') to obtain access to skills and equipment? In her contribution, Maureen McCue begins an account of recent moves by the Greater London Arts Association to train women and ethnic minorities, a discussion that should be extended. We also hope to report soon on the recent training schemes for black media workers co-initiated by the Association of Cinematographic, Television and Allied Technicians and Channel Four.

Although the last decade has seen some extension of film-making training in formal education, recent policy changes at the Royal College of Art and the cuts in provision at the Slade School of Fine Art, University of London, for instance, have vastly transformed two of the most influential seedbeds for the current generation of independent film-makers. Meanwhile, the industrial power and prestige of the National Film and Television School (one of the few institutions enabling graduates

to acquire a union card) maintains the influence of its *cinéma-vérité* orientation in documentary. Furthermore, both the National and the RCA can expect serious changes as the result of the proposed withdrawal of Eady Levy funding from the former and the injection of private industrial monies (Goldcrest) into the latter. Neither initiative bodes well for practices which style themselves as independent from the commercial interests of the industry, as socialist, as, indeed, 'counter-cinemas'.

In a discussion such as this, the educational histories and institutional experience of the participants become particularly important. SUE ASPINALL (SA) has been involved in informal training with independent workshops in London. This autumn she begins a three-year course in documentary direction at the National Film School. NICK DUBRULE (ND) studied at Newcastle Polytechnic Fine Art Department and did post-graduate work at the Royal Colege of Art Film School. He now works as an independent film-maker and recently produced *Shoreline*. MIKE LEGGETT (ML), an independent film-maker and member of the Bristol Film-makers Workshop, teaches at Exeter College of Art. MALCOLM LE GRICE (MLG), Head of the Film Department at St Martin's College of Art in London, is an independent film-maker and author of *Abstract Film and Beyond*. MAUREEN McCUE (MM) is the Film Officer of the Greater London Arts Association. SARAH MONTGOMERY (SM) studied in the Visual Communications Department of Goldsmith's College, London. On leaving, she joined the Pictures of Women collective, who produced the 'Sexuality' series for Channel Four's *Eleventh Hour*. ROD STONEMAN (RS) was a post-graduate student at the Slade and is currently Assistant Commissioning Editor for Independent Film and Video, Channel Four.

The Industry

MLG: We're here under the banner of the Society for *Education* in Film and Television (SEFT), and yet, as soon as we talk about the practical aspects of cinema and TV practice, we start using the term 'training', and this seems to me very typical; 'training' does suggest that we think in terms of a fixed division of labour where we have practical people who can be at the service of those people whose responsibility it is to construct ideas. It seems very strange that when we apply this kind of idea to the independent and workshop sector and to the development of practical film work within education, we continue to use the term 'training'. It's strange that we don't automatically assume that the actual production of artifacts is as much an issue of education as the area which SEFT has traditionally, habitually, addressed. So we must be careful not to reinforce the concept of the division of labour, the old ideas about what was the professional – which I think is the totally unprofessional – those people who are defined as professional because they're totally malleable and capable of coming up with the goods without actually ever questioning the underlying meaning of the product.

ML: The industry requires stable technicians with some knowledge and experience but also a certain amount of versatility, affability and sureness, a kind of confidence. There can be no room for technicians who have doubts about their particular role in the industry; they have to be fully committed to it and see their role as servicing it. That's on the technical side, but you also have administrators who are somewhat stable people, people who'll stay in a bureaucratic position, and then producers or directors who are preferably trained up from the ranks or taken direct from university with an arts degree into traineeship. Training, in relation to the industry, is a non-interactive process, it's a matter of the transfer of information, training defined by the production processes. The technicians who will be brought into those areas will become more science-based educationally because they'll be working with a medium which is becoming less tactile and mechanical (unlike a mechanically based medium such as film). It will become more conceptual, which is what electronic engineering will cause to happen, and that requires a scientifically trained person.

RS: I think that the work of SEFT (and more specifically the work of *Screen*), in the last decade, has been to attack, break down and complicate the naturalised division between mental and manual labour; and within mental labour, the persistent division between the academic and the creative. However, this division is still the starting point if you're going to talk about real institutions and real opportunities for people who are interested in organising audio-visual stuff in this country at this time. You have at least to address the dichotomies that are still very heavily enforced ideologically and institutionally.

MLG: It must be said that the film unions have a lot of responsibility for maintaining the concept of a division of labour, and one of the reasons that the professional areas of the industry and the unions are becoming slightly more responsive to movement in the independent sector is that the direction of new technology and automation make that division less and less tenable. The attempt to retain the division of labour in training is being made more difficult because new technology doesn't require a division of labour in that sense, and, with the electronic systems of video editing, there's absolutely no reason why a person can't be competent across the whole range of the production process.

ND: I find the difficulty with what both Mike and Malcolm have been saying is that their vision of the industry and its future is so monolithic: it excludes any consideration of the struggles and contradictions which are fundamental to the functioning of all sectors of the industry. Every form of production in our society necessitates some form of power relationship between those who set up a production, with whatever sources of funding, and those who are persuaded to assist them in the specialised roles that are needed for that production. It is a classic employer/ employee relationship and historically the employees, precisely because they are necessary to the production, have managed, through the various forms of organisation available to them, to wrest some power for themselves. This 'give and take' situation has embedded itself in the tradi-

tions of the industry, and I think that has to be respected. You cannot say that there is no interaction and that technicians are always compliant.

ML: I know that the union is extremely active in pursuing wages and conditions, and quite rightly so. But how often at Annual Conference do you hear programme content debated, apart from the debate every year about bias in the media which actually reads 'there is not enough left wing propaganda, there's too much right wing, middle ground propaganda'?

ND: I don't think one should neglect the importance of the arguments that come into the union about sexism in the media, and, even if the focus of discussion is often wages and conditions and reproducing an employee/employer relationship, one has to respect the terms in which that struggle is taking place.

'Production Values'

MLG: The idea of technical or 'production' values as they're called, the technical gloss of the work in the television and film industry, is in effect a form of deliberate filtering, a deliberate mechanism for retaining exclusivity within production and dissemination. The power of the assumptions about this have implanted themselves deeply in our psyches to a point where we feel at a considerable disadvantage at the level of technical ability. But in many respects technical issues are painfully simple, and the question of skill can't be reduced to only technical skills; yet that's how it has been presented and it keeps people away from producing within the media. Unless we recognise that this is similar to the way in which law protects economic privilege, that technical requirements and production values (the need to produce convincingly illusionistic continuities, etc) are the equivalent to law in the field of ideological discourse and if we don't have this starting point as educators, we're undermining our own position. If we're going to have any dialogue with the dominant culture, we have to prepare ourselves and our students for dealing with that.

RS: We should be aware of the perils and problems of the perpetuation of these 'production values', but we have at least to make the argument for an 'historical compromise' with them. In a sense the same is true with verbal language for groups who want to intervene in society through discourse: the degree of literacy, pronunciation, spelling and all that — it's a complicated system! A cultural and historical system has been so naturalised that its acquisition or non-acquisition privileges certain individuals and groups in relation to their ability to interact with the rest of society. There must be space for different strategies if one wants to have some short-term impact on social discourses and structures — working in film and TV, or even outside television. Even if you're making a video for use in the labour movement or for a women's group, say, the comparisons that'll be made about the arrangement of your images and sounds will be with the images and sounds that are put together for

altogether more astronomical budgets in the dominant media and you'll have to relate yourself to that; you can't just say 'I'm somewhere else'. If you're trying to interact you have got to take on those terms, because that is the context in which most interventions (no matter how brave) are going to be understood.

Workshops

MLG: In the independent sector the main concern is to tie up the questions of technology, technique and the means of production with the reasons for production. Why is something being done, what direction is it going in, what is its subject, what are its implications?

SA: Mike seems to set up a polarisation between the industry, which produces these distracting little entertainments, and the workshops, which produce knowledge of some kind, and which are based on an artisanal model. What is it exactly that we feel the workshops are offering?

MM: Open access courses were reaching people who couldn't be reached in other ways; they were questioning the methodology of film-making and creating a body of people who will not only become part of an independent sector but also infiltrate into the industry itself. I think that's a fairly important strategy if we recognise that television is primarily a very powerful and important mode of distribution which we might ultimately have some influence on, by changing ways of working right at the beginning. We need to think about the Government's current emphasis on media education and study in schools. I know the British Film Institute's response to that is to encourage teachers to be in close contact with the workshops in their area who will then train them. A lot of teachers have been lumbered with teaching film-making without any experience whatsoever. They won't have a lot of extra money in their budgets to do it, and so they will call on the regionally based workshops to help them. The development of the curriculum will be towards media studies, starting in 1986; it won't just be film and video, but it will include radio, print-making or printing. There are also community courses done in conjunction with Adult Education authorities, and through some workshops. Next are the workshops themselves and how they work: workers' collectives with people coming in with some training at that kind of artisanal level. Those ways of working are particularly good for people who have previously been disenfranchised – such as women and ethnic minorities – because a lot of it is actually building up confidence. What is usually talked about is domination of the air waves and conquering the earth. That kind of thing is very much a male attitude, and a dominant cultural attitude as well, which people outside find very difficult to relate to and it's not necessarily their style, their politics or anything to do with them. It seems particularly valuable to broaden the access and entry into the professional or independent sector. The scenario for the workshops is going to be at a much lower level than originally envisaged. Some workshops may be an exception, but it will depend on what happens with

Channel Four. There's a kind of 'pegging' going on with your 'profes-sional' work at the top, the workshops doing educational and community cable and then all the little community courses going on. The emphasis on professionalism is ultimately going to be very detrimental to those col-lective practices, to inter-active practices.

SA: This scenario seems to be putting a lot of emphasis on the workshops but in my experience they're not capable of doing those things that you seem to be suggesting they will do. For one thing, access is incredibly limited. I don't know what the situation is regionally, but in London it seems to be, and to perform this training function the workshops would need a lot more finance. The courses that they run are very fragmented, they're small scale courses running for only a few weeks and there's no permanent structure, no permanent staffing to provide training, so you can't continue to get advice and knowledge.

MM: I would agree, there's a lot of pressure and demands being put on the workshops and most of them are producing films and not really doing a lot else. This has posed enormous problems for the funders — we funded them because they were teaching people to make films, or exhibiting films or giving access to film-makers, and we find that access is diminish-ing because a lot of time is spent on production. Channel Four under-budgeted all those productions so they actually had to use state-subsidised facilities to make the productions and the whole thing has become a vicious circle. But the workshops are not the place to carry on beginners' courses; they're capable of doing that but to develop you need really good facilities. One of the things that I've been encouraged by is a pro-ject we've embarked on at the Inner London Education Authority's initi-ative, to open up the Battersea television studio for training women and ethnic minorities, starting with basic television studio techniques and moving on to more advanced ones but using very different methods of teaching, producing a different kind of interaction in terms of class and sexual stereotypes. It's certainly not an easy problem, but I think the workshops are instructional at a much more community level.

RS: Historically the Workshop Declaration was developed to find an organisational form for a mode of practice which was called 'integrated practice', a rather clumsy term. 'Integrated' in this sense meant that within a production group there were different areas, defined as educa-tional, exhibition and production. Briefly, the problem is that the sources of finance have distorted the relationship between these activi-ties — funding from Channel Four inevitably tends to privilege the process of film production. And indeed the process of film production for transmission tends to efface other forms of distribution or showing and talking, and other forms of independent production. So, given this economic distortion of integrated practice, the other funding sources, putting Channel Four aside, could perhaps make a point of pushing a policy which counterbalances that distortion by reasserting educational distribution and activities within a collective.

SM: Another distortion provoked by Channel Four funding is the sense that the life goes out of a project as soon as it has been shown on the

Channel. But we saw our programmes (Pictures of Women: Sexuality) as having a life after Channel Four and I think with certain topics you can stimulate discussion even if you're not showing the whole thing. So I don't think that it was death on transmission, in our case, to the extent that it might be in the case of other independent material.

ML: The Workshop Declaration is what we want it to be; it's not as though the industry is dictating to us – we defined the Declaration and it's open to modification at any time. I'm surprised that people are saying that the small number of workshops are actually working in an exclusive way, because my understanding is that a majority are working in an extended way – certainly in Newcastle, Birmingham, and even the unfranchised workshops like the one in Bristol where, with the small amount of production money we have, each production is considered constantly in reference to other productions in the workshop.

MM: We changed the way we funded workshops because we were finding there *was* a problem of access. We decided this year to implement a new policy to put money into workshops to contribute towards the salary and overheads of an access worker, someone who is going to make sure that there's a certain amount of access. We were finding that, with the emphasis on integrated practice, we were putting an annual grant in but not being sure of what was coming out.

MLG: What Maureen said about access for the disenfranchised made me think of a difficulty we currently have with enrolling people onto a BA course. Its entry qualifications are always couched in the term 'normal', which means that they can be over-ridden – particularly in art education. Nonetheless they do represent a filter and workshops allow access to people who would find it extremely difficult to get into the higher education sector, and we're tending (we're probably a little enlightened in this) to treat applicants who've come from the workshop sector as if they'd had a foundation course. We're actually seeing a year working at the London Film Makers Co-op or Four Corners[1] as being the equivalent to working on a foundation course in an art school. Perhaps for a certain period priority should be given to the workshops as a way of dealing with the disenfranchised and if this were at the expense of the higher education sector, so be it.

Formal Education

MLG: One of the problems with practical film as it's developed within polytechnics and art colleges is that it has tended to grow out of technical photography courses to which it remains attached – unlike in the university sector where they've tended to grow out of drama or English courses. The underlying assumption of those technically based courses, which is now being very strongly reinforced by Government policy, is that they are broadly lower level courses which are primarily training and vocational. This policy will mean that education in the formal sector will veer more and more towards the production of compliant and

[1] Both are London workshops, offering access for training.

pliable technicians. Thus, whether that's an inevitable process or not, our role ideologically as educators is to resist it, and we would resist it better if we denied the assumptions of technical training and stressed the idea of educating sensibilities. The problem of the informal sector comes from the idea that you can teach people the techniques; when they've got those techniques they know how to put a film together. What it actually means is that they just borrow from the dominant language because that's their only experience. That is an unfortunate scenario and, as educators, our function is to provide a framework within which the standard divisions of labour can be resisted, not just through the technology but by ensuring that the means and the meanings are brought under the control of those who produce the work.

RS: How does that look from the other side of the fence, to people who go through those processes as students towards production groups, etc?

SM: On some courses at colleges you're told repeatedly that the course isn't going to be enough to get you a job within the industry, although it is very industry-oriented. You're in danger of being caught in limbo when you finish; you don't have the technical skills to offer yourself in any way.

ND: The institutions I studied in were very much grounded in the traditions of 'Fine Art' and rarely ever felt the need to justify themselves with any industrial/vocational basis. In fact their distance from the industry is a very conscious one in that it allows them the space to create radical perspectives and forms of work which can be totally critical and independent of the dominant media. However, this distance creates a number of problems: for one thing, the students' work can never truly engage with any audience or institutional framework outside the one in which it is produced. And when this particular institution makes a virtue out of its own alienation, once those students have left the college, it becomes virtually impossible for them to draw on that experience to engage in an interactive way with the intricacies of circulation, production and technique in the various institutions of the media. But even within the college-related situation there are problems: although as students you may be encouraged to think critically and formulate your own ideas, in the end you have to prove the viability and importance of those ideas in the realisation of a finished product. It is through this isolated physical object that your work can then be criticised and assessed. The whole process involved in making this product disappears from view as the individual student is forced into a one-to-one relationship with the end results of his/her work. The network of social relations that should be recognised as part and parcel of the technology of film and video becomes reduced to an irritation and an obstacle to the film-maker's 'statement'. You are in a position where you have to persuade people to help you make 'your' film and it is okay if they do it as a favour but you have to avoid any more active involvement, or it might threaten your personal presence in the finished object. You would never dream of letting somebody else edit your film, for example. Even if you try to set up collectives, which several of us found a very useful way of making the

different tasks involved in a production more tangible and significant, you are always faced with the disruptive problem of individual assessments at the end of the year.

MLG: This individualist, existentialist ethos within art schools is causing the sort of problems you're talking about in relation to film education, and it inhibits the development of forms of collective practice. But we mustn't confuse collective practice with the industry; there's individual practice or industrial practice which is not collective. Genuine collective practice in the sense of collective responsibility is integrated responsibility without hierarchisation. It's much easier to build that from an individualistic practice than on the industry models which are always hiding a deeper hierarchy of economic and legal relations.

SM: Another problem, in my experience, was the academic and theoretical lectures which were very interesting but didn't provide a language with which to communicate with the different people who were teaching the practical work.

MLG: The predominance of theory over practice isn't absolutely typical across formal film courses. Certainly courses which have come out of art schools have, if anything, been production-centred at the expense of a critical framework and theory. There's a problem in the application of critical and theoretical relations to production, which isn't just a product of the educational system; it is intrinsically different because you're talking about different forms of mediation.

RS: Could you specify that difference?

MLG: In my own practice it's always been extremely difficult to know what the exact relationship is between a theoretical formulation in an essay or a piece of writing, and the work of a film. The relationship that the imaginary, intuitive construction in the work of film has to a theoretical construction has never been one to one. There have been points where they've diverged and points when they've seemed to converge.

SM: I appreciate that, but it's also that sometimes you feel unable to communicate in theoretical language what you want to make, and there might be crossed lines. And it's about students actually being able to do what they want to do and feeling limited within the particular tradition of wherever it is they are studying.

RS: Within some art colleges there has been a marked institutionalisation of alternative modes – particularly during the brief hegemony of structural materialist film in the experimental field. Just as the way industrial models are taught in theoretically bereft institutions such as the National Film School, where you say 'there is the 180 degree rule, there is the eyeline and you do not cross it', alternative forms of film-making can be taught in an equally regimented way, with the transmission of knowledge in one direction, from teacher to student (e.g. 'there is the 180 degree rule and you should break it all the time'). Alternatively you can present a range of possibilities for the arrangement of images and sounds and the function of how you put them together and explore the specific implications of each of them, without rigid and all-embracing rules which must be obeyed or rules which must be broken.

MLG: But not all rules are equally supported in the culture and education to transgress certain rules and to replace certain conventions by other conventions might be justified within a polemic against that culture. You're talking from a liberal standpoint where all possibilities are of equal value and it's up to education to provide the spectrum of them. I would not go along with that. We are involved in taking certain conventions supported by the economic, political and cultural system and, within education, trying to modify, break down, stimulate and reinforce alternatives to that.

ND: Once one starts talking about film in terms of convention and anti-convention, one can easily take it out of the sphere of social relations, so that it does become a matter of either reproducing one set of conventions or another, rather than having the ability to deal politically with the social relations which those conventions embody. Film production is not outside social relations and you have to deal politically with the conditions of production in which you're working. It's like that division which tends to exist in education between practice and theory whereby you start saying that practice is the process of joining together the film and shooting the camera and theory is the idea that sets up that practice. But in the end both are tied into a network of social relations that has to be thought about and dealt with; the film has to be thought about in terms of its distribution and exhibition, what institutions it fits into, where it came from.

From Training to Funding

SA: There is a gap when you come out of your course and then want to make films; there's just a leap into the unknown to ask for money. A lot of work produced by the independent sector is inadequate in many ways and I think the reason for this is the lack of sufficient stages of development and training. Even supposing you've got a certain amount of experience and ideas about what you want to do, you still have to hawk round all the funding bodies. But there's no further training, no further collective identity, to sustain the process of development. I think perhaps the BFI should take more responsibility for that.

MLG: I agree, but you can't solve that problem without changing the culture. The limbo exists because the educational and independent sectors' aspirations have run way ahead of what's possible within that culture. In formal education there's a deficiency at the post-graduate level. Students rarely have the experience of working with more than about a £200-£300 budget on any of their productions. There's very little bridging funding into the next level and the BFI Production Board has actually exacerbated that by attempting to follow a policy of making films for the mythical art film circuit, which hardly exists in this country. When you come out of college, there's little way you could expect to make a feature film. The years it takes to hustle the money and all that goes into it, are a nightmare of mega-finance. You're better off

trying to do a short film or a smaller project where you can establish your identity in the way you want to and then in some way feed into the existing distribution network.

MM: The Regional Arts Associations are pathetically under-funded. The fundamental structural problem is an argument about whether you have a Ministry of Culture which is responsible for the development of the arts and with potential for a progressive arts policy, or the unsatisfactory quango situation you've got at the moment with the Arts Council cutting back and Uriah Heep-like bowing in front of Mrs Thatcher and saying 'well, we don't need any more money, we can get on with what we've got: thank you very much for what you've given us' – holding on to a very contemplative and traditional approach to the arts.

MLG: Although there is a continuum of places to go from the community end into the higher education sector of BTEC[2] and BA courses, there are difficulties of access for minorities and working class kids and women, but the major gap is in a sense beyond that. We see it in the huge number of applicants for a totally non-accredited post-graduate course at St Martin's. In the post-graduate area there's really only the National Film and TV School, the Royal College, Middlesex Polytechnic and Bristol University at the practical level. And there is a large demand, not only from people in film training wanting to do post-graduate, but from those who've done a degree in another subject. The change in policy at the Royal College of Art has meant that the independent sector no longer has a post-graduate course to cater for its area of work: that is a major break in the spectrum of desirable provision which is a real reason for putting on the pressure.

ML: Only change at the centre is going to cause other changes. New ideas about modes of social provision, social amenities, something to capture people's imagination, need to be fed into the labour movement. The labour movement has got a lot to answer for over the last twenty years – it's entirely lacked imagination when it comes to the media.

RS: Although it's important to locate pressure points, points at which polemic can be made and have some effect on the restricted finances available within the institutions we've been talking about, in the long term the only perspective which would allow the developments now clearly seen to be necessary in the sector is a massive shift of resources and, indeed, a different way of thinking about audio-visual production in Britain. Effectively that can only be done in a different social, governmental context and in the longer term. So the immediate struggles for available monies must feed into the long-term strategy of making policy priorities for organised groups of social forces. At the point when the last Labour government fell, Michael Meacher, Under Secretary of the Board of Trade, was talking about a development in funding workshops which would have put three times the currently available resources into the hands of the kind of film-making and education we're talking about. That was in 1979; now we're working within severe constrictions which inevitably restrict the scope of this work.

MLG: It's clear that at this point the major medium of social relations

[2] Business and Technical Education Council – the body which controls the validation of Diploma and Higher Diploma courses, a level below BA Honours courses.

and social influence is television. The audio-visual moving image is at the centre of our cultural relations, much more than the written word. If you compare its cultural importance with the educational provision for those areas (appreciation, theory, criticism or production) the mis-match is staggering. At some point this underprovision has got to be recognised. But we should also foresee that economic forces are going to find new strategies for making access to its articulation more difficult. History shows that the powerful medium of information and exchange is also the powerful medium of social control and the pressure to hold that within the economic ruling group is huge. Thus control of the satellite and information systems is going to be reinforced by legal constraints, and copyright law is going to be formed in such a way that you can't use this public information for your own purposes. It sounds very idealistic, but we've got to build up conceptual positions which deal with that as a major problem.

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THE FACILITY TO UNITE

A MODEST PROPOSAL
BY RICHARD WOOLLEY

Last year I made a film called *Waiting for Alan*. It might equally well have been called *Waiting for Peter*, *Waiting for Rodney*, or even *Waiting for Barrie*. Because now everyone seems to be waiting. In fact since the advent of Channel Four and despite the Workshop Declaration the fact of waiting, the act of waiting has become an art defined, practiced and refined by all elements of the far flung independent sector. Of course people who have spent most of their working lives in the world of grants, panels, boards and commissions have become used to waiting, used to standing in queues only to find the shop closing just when they thought it was their turn at the counter. Some waiters have become philosophical, some angry, some have 'retired' to teach the art of waiting to others and some have jumped over the counter to become shopkeepers only to find that it can be equally depressing looking at the queue from the other side.

A few years back it wasn't only the waiting that was lengthening faces and confirming the newly arrived eighties as the decade of depression and growing old. There was something equally frustrating and pernicious as waiting — being on the 'stoofs' (short term one-off film-making schemes). As a successful stoof your back would ache from all the people talking behind it and your heart would fill with the hope that the world had at last opened up for you, that God (and Marx) were after all on your side. But when the film was finished you were back with the waiters of the Charlotte Street cafés, desperately serving up ever more tantalising dishes to jaded palates. Then a new cry arose:

'Continuity of employment!' Determined ex-stoofs from the North East, veteran skilled waiters from London, the Midlands and the Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire, and some very good ACTTors from the straight theatre in Soho Square came together and made a declaration. 'Form your own shops and work in them.' 'Become a co-op shop, a workshop, and the ACTTors will act for you so that you no longer need to be stoofs or waiters, but can become fully fledged film-makers making films year after year without worry or wasteful waiting....' But what about the old shopkeepers, the people behind the counters, would they agree? Well, after a very good show from the ACTTors, they did and from Charing Cross Road to Charlotte Street waiters became diners and stoofs became woofs (workers on ongoing finance). But when word had got around that the way to get security and money was to open a shop, everybody opened one: cornershops, bookshops, closed shops and open shops. Gradually a new queue formed and the ACTTors could only provide temporary provisions for the new waiter/shopkeepers because there were very limited funds available and only a few could become woofs. This was clearly better than no one being in a position of receiving ongoing finance, but it was still highly unsatisfactory and began to lead to divisions among the waiters, the woofs and the stoofs. A common cause was needed or the sector would subdivide against itself like a ginger beer plant....

Before moving on to a possible happy ending

for the above fairy tale let me explain, with less fanciful words, how the 'Independent Grant-aided Sector' operates at the moment in all its forms and manifestations. There are now basically five sources of finance and three ways of receiving money. The British Film Institute provides £220,000 to workshops adhering to the Declaration, and a variable amount (from £300,000 to £500,000 depending on Channel Four, Eady subsidies, etc) to freelance film-makers. The former is handed out by the regional production fund and the latter by the Production Board. Channel Four, via the Commissioning Editor for the grant-aided sector, gives about a £1,000,000 out to workshops and holds a further £200,000–£400,000 for single projects which can be commissioned from either an individual, group of individuals, or an officially franchised workshop. Arts Associations with miniscule budgets give tiny single production support, even smaller bursaries and in some instances revenue support for access or umbrella groups which offer limited production facilities on a relatively open house basis. In London some franchising money is channelled through the Greater London Arts Association towards two workshops, but this is not a nationwide pattern as the franchising of one workshop of four people would use up most of an Arts Association's film budget, leaving the already barely catered for beginner and low budget art film/video-maker halfpennyless. The Arts Council provides a certain amount of money for experimental (as-defined-by-Peter-Gidal-and-Malcolm-Le Grice-in-1969) films and videos on very low budgets and a lot more money for documentaries about other artists. They tend to favour single film-makers, but there is nothing to stop a workshop applying for this money. Finally there are local authorities who usually offer money in the form of matching monies, but in some cases offer direct funding, as with the Greater London Council. So much for the giving of money in the sector, now onto how it can be received and used.

To receive money as a workshop you have to have a constitution approved by the tele-cine union, the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians, and be able to fulfill the conditions of the Workshop Declaration. This means that you should have at least four members, that you are non-profit making and that all members of the 'shop' have joint rights over the material. Once in such an organisation you may work in any way you wish provided that outsiders working with you are paid up to standard rates if your product is shown on television. As an individual (or group of individuals not franchised as a workshop) you have to work under standard agreements if your money comes from Channel Four or the Arts Council documentaries budget, and under the relevant Code of Practice if money comes from either the British Film Institute Production Board or an Arts Association. If experimenting with the Arts Council you can usually just get on with it on the assumption that you probably won't ever be showing it on television, which you are assumed to abhor as a sell-out that you turned your back on in 1968. Finally, right at the bottom of the pile, you can be a first-time film or video-maker (or even a part-time f/v-maker making positive use of your enforced unemployment) receiving £500 grants from Regional Arts Associations or merely two roles of film and a second-hand tape. You may be lucky enough to be part of an access/umbrella group which has some limited resources to help you develop your film, but often (even within the supposedly caring sharing grant-aided sector) you will be left to fend for yourself, dismissed as an amateur or not even allowed to start.

So what on earth do all these groups have in common? How can such a sector so diverse in status and power, form and content, unite around any common cause apart from a rather patronising 'What some of us have achieved today, others may be lucky enough to reap the benefits of tomorrow'? Well, from top to bottom, from the haves to the have-nots, from the employed to the unemployed, anyone making a film or video whether for £200,000 or £200 needs the means to make it with. This is a common need which should be under common ownership and not the property of any one producing group, whether lucky stoofs or well-off woofs. I am not talking about every pic-sync, Bolex, U-matic and role of splicing tape being centralised but about the heavier equipment: dubbing facilities, off-line editing systems for video, and some cameras and flatbed editing equipment which cannot possibly be used all the time by one group, but which often sits on their premises and under their control even though in some cases it has been paid for by grant-aided money from Channel Four or the British Film

Institute. I can understand that at the moment certain groups do not want to have to deal continuously with the problems of booking and administration and that they feel uneasy about beginners getting hold of their hard-won hardware. I can understand the problem of maintenance costs, but if the small production groups and workshops do not have the time, money or commitment to administrate equipment donated to them for the good of all then they should relinquish control of that equipment to an organisation that will specialise in looking after, hiring out and generally managing that equipment for the whole sector.

These centralised facility/access centres (or technicians' workshops) would be made up of two or three specialised technicians and one administrator who could advise on contractual matters (Channel Four, Equity, ACTT, the Musicians Union), applications (BFI, the Arts Council, Channel Four, RAAs) and generally coordinate resources in the region and interregionally. Each facility/access house would be self-managing in terms of their conditions of work and pay, but under the overall control of a management committee made up of the various representatives of the grant-aided sector in each region. They would not be producer/director or 'auteur' workshops (as most franchised workshops at the moment effectively are), but would be purely servicing centres set up specifically to provide a start to finish technical back-up for anyone in a region making a film or video, whether in a workshop or on the dole. They would have dubbing, sound transfer and recording facilities for film, off-line and eventually broadcast edit facilities for video, communal cutting rooms that could be booked (though I would think it right and proper that a franchised producer/director workshop should have one equipped cutting room of its own which when not being used could be fed into the centralised admin of the technicians' workshop who could then allocate it to someone in need).

In the event of complete newcomers wanting to make films or videos, training workshops in the use of the equipment could be run and guidance would be available on a day-to-day basis for those unfamiliar with film or video processes. All equipment would be regularly serviced and the 'big' grant-aided producer could expect as reliable a back-up service as from any commercial facility house, while the newcomer

or 'low level' producer could be expected to be treated as a human being and not feel excluded by 'those up there' and 'those in the money'. It would not be just a facility house for the rich, an exclusive club for woofs and stoofs, it would be for rich and poor alike and help bridge the gap between them.

What made the sector special in the seventies was its commitment to an open sharing practice for film-makers and video-makers who did not have access or were in opposition to the established media. This commitment to togetherness rather than competition is what differentiates the sector from the commercial world and without it there is no reason for special favourable agreements from the union, no reason for calling ourselves the genuine independent sector, no reason to consider ourselves different. I feel this sense of unity and commitment to the sector as a whole could be re-established through the setting up of facility/access centres. Without them, without this technical common property and service, the well-off parts of the sector will be increasingly indistinguishable from straight commercial companies and the original allowance made by the union for 'other' work practices will look increasingly hollow. The Workshop Declaration itself will run the risk of becoming just a way of making films on the cheap and not the backbone of an integrated alternative practice benefiting the whole sector as it should be.

Very good, you may say, very cosy, but surely a bit utopian, a bit abstract? Who's going to pay? There are various ways of financing such central organisations. First of all, anyone receiving grant-aided money, whether as a workshop or freelance for a major production (Channel 4, BFI, or Arts Council documentaries), would be expected to pay a percentage of their budget to the centre in return for use of the equipment for the duration of that production. This would ensure a fixed sum of money for centres in areas where there are franchised workshops and would allow money given out in budgets by Channel 4 and the BFI to be recirculated for the benefit of the whole sector instead of all draining away to facility houses which are profit orientated or to individual well equipped workshops who are under no obligation to recirculate that hire money for the benefit of all. This recirculated money, as well as going towards maintenance and purchase of equipment, would also allow

waiters and first-timers to have access to the facility centre equipment free of charge provided that a major paying client didn't need it. In this way you would in effect be getting twice the subsidy for the same money and the haves would be supporting and benefiting the have-nots without any harm being done to themselves or the quality of their product.

Secondly, each Arts Association would be expected to make the facility/access centre in its region a priority client, receiving the lion's share of revenue finance. In return any small production grants given out by an RAA would include free access to the technical centre (a considerable grant-in-kind boost for the very low budget film-maker). In the event of the BFI deciding to rechannel Arts Association film monies (not a debate I want to enter into in detail here) the new technician/access centres could become the perfect repository for that money with their administrators (or a second administrator) taking on may of the functions of the old film officer with regard to production activities. The BFI could also allot a percentage of its Production Board and production fund budgets to support of the centres (money not being 'taken' from these bodies but helping their clients), and more importantly give a definite priority to equipping and housing these facility/access centres in its housing the cinema and projects funds. Channel Four, as well as providing hidden finance through workshop and individual budgets, could also make an annual contribution to each of the technical centres using the argument that these were now the hub of the grant-aided production system which would ensure the Channel high quality, relatively low budget product. The ACTT could help by drawing up a new technicians' declaration for the centres and stipulating that workshops and people working on Code of Practice films should make use of these centres unless they have some very good reason not to (perhaps the percentage would have to be paid whether they made use of the centre or not). The union grant-aided committee could act as a central monitoring body to check that payments were made.

In the event of equipment or editing space going unused for a period, a limited quota of commercial hirings could be allowed provided it did not affect usage by the priority clientele. Clearly in the first three or four years there

would also have to be a considerable raising of additional capital funds to get a dozen (one in each region and two in London?) centres up to the required standard and local authorities as well as inner city development grants and aid to industry projects would all have to be heavily lobbied. But after such an initial push I think all centres should be able to survive and grow by a combination of methods outlined above and simultaneously service the big 'woofs' and successful 'stoofs' while protecting and giving the chance of activity (albeit often minimal) to waiters and disadvantaged groups and individuals seeking first-time access to the media.

Let me give you an example from my area, Yorkshire. We already have a Communications Centre (with a technician of infinite patience) which services all in the region regardless of race, creed, sex or status/wealth and we also have access workshops in Sheffield, York, Leeds and Bradford with different levels of equipment (and, in one case, with a part-time technician). This system needs co-ordinating under a centralised facility access house umbrella with, say, film dubbing and sound recording in Bradford and video facilities in Sheffield. (Yorkshire is a big county and people feel rightfully resentful if all equipment is put in one place, though this might not be the case in other regions, where film activity is more geographically concentrated.) But the principle is already there and my own film *Waiting for Alan* (which was incidentally made entirely with equipment from the region right up to and including the final mix) proved the effectiveness of a 'protected' common ownership technical base which offered me an enormous grant-in-kind merely by being there and offering free facilities, under the proviso that if I landed a large production from Channel 4 or elsewhere I would still make use of these facilities but pay a percentage of my budget to ensure their continuation and improvement. Similarly, the Communications Centre has consistently done all sound recording and post-production work for the franchised Animation Workshop from Leeds and provided important technical assistance to the Sheffield Film Co-op.

I remember one day last summer when we were in the Centre track-laying *Waiting for Alan*, the sound editor of the Sheffield Co-op was transferring sounds in the back room, and two members of the Bradford Film Group were learning how to use a camera in the front room

with the technician manager of the Centre. All levels of finance were represented on that day: the fully financed Co-op who were paying for their use of the Centre; the individual film-maker who was recycling money from the sale of an earlier film to Channel Four but very dependent on the availability of a technical base; and the beginners, the trainees, for whom the doors of the Centre had been open and welcoming. In fact, since Channel Four delivered one of its thirteen Steenbecks to the Bradford Communications Centre two years ago, there has hardly been a day when it has not been used. Yet it has never broken down because out of the tiny budget the Centre receives from Yorkshire Arts an additional freelance technician is paid to come and service it regularly and/or in emergencies. Are there other recipients of those Steenbecks two years ago who can say that theirs has been used as much by as many people?

The *basis* of an access/technician workshop is already operating in Yorkshire, and clients from the biggest to the smallest benefit even if they would like to see improvements and changes in the way it is run and financed. I know there are other such embryonic examples around the country, in Nottingham for instance or London Video Arts, and I know there are franchised workshops with enough equipment to form the basis of a facility/access centre in some areas where only a change of control of that area of their operations would be required to ensure a centre for all of the sector in that region.

I in no way advocate the undoing of what has been done through the Workshop Declaration and the organisations it has facilitated, but such a statement does not answer the question of temporarily limited finance when issues of 'continuity of employment versus taking it in turns' become of importance to the sector as a whole. There are now something like 30 provisionally franchised workshops all waiting for money which for the past two or three years has been given out to the same dozen or so groups. Are they the best? Does their right to fight for continuity of employment override the right of others to work for a while? Should there be some sort of rotating basis so that some of the first franchised workshops would be expected to survive for a year or maybe two without the direct funding of the seeding grant-aided bodies?

In a very short space of time the workshop sector has ended up being in exactly the same situation as the early one-off financed film-maker. Some workshops win the pools (three or more years running finance), some win nothing and wait and apply and apply and wait. Frustrations build up, the union tells people this is the way forward, but the union cannot produce money and people get disillusioned. Those who have been successful form their own organisation to protect their interests (an understandable tradition common to all groups with access to power and money throughout history) and now say anyone who attacks their right to continuous funding is way out of line. But no one is attacking their right and no one is under any illusion that the first priority is to unite to get more funding so that in the end all workshops in all of the country can be funded all of the time. But in the meantime here is a system for allowing those waiting to at least get on with some limited activity, but also a common cause and campaign behind which the whole sector can unite (as they did for the Workshop Declaration) for the immediate benefit of the whole sector. No one is going to be disadvantaged by it and many more will benefit than the 48 or so people presently on full-time wages through the Declaration. Carry on expanding that producer/director sector, but before the splits and resentments get too bad and before the financing bodies get confused and wary let's unite behind providing what anybody making film or video requires: equipment backed up by technical expertise and administrative efficiency. Let those who have benefited from the struggle for the Workshop Declaration and the *Eleventh Hour* budget in Channel Four share out their wealth in a way which will not dilute or undermine their operations, and let those who receive large single grants (some as big as £500,000) share that money with those not so lucky by contributing to centralised facilities which are available to all.

Let us all unite behind a campaign which will benefit the whole sector as it now exists, allow for new people to enter into it (even television has provisions for that) and secure it against future vagaries of finance by giving it a strong technical base which is not in the hands of one small group but under the control of all independent grant-aided film-makers in a given region. The campaign within the union for such facility/access centres is also of the greatest importance and will break new ground in the

democratisation and introduction of workers' control at a technicians level. Until now workshops have too often functioned as producer/director units, employing technicians mostly from outside. Even in cases where they have undertaken all technical roles themselves the very nature of producing and needing to be financed in competition to other groups has led to an increasing blurring of the line between workshop and straight production company (albeit with good political ideals). This is an inevitable development and not necessarily wrong or bad because we live in a highly competitive capitalist society and not in heaven, but to protect ourselves from the insidious ethic of that society we sometimes need to set up structures with more safeguards and concern for the common good than the present workshop system has managed to do with its very small self-contained production units. As I pointed out earlier, there are now a lot of four to six person workshop applicants waiting, who only differ from their 'one-off' ancestors in that they scream 'US, US, US' instead of 'ME, ME, ME'. Equally those in receipt of increasingly large single budgets from Channel Four and the British Film Institute seem to feel very little need to express their solidarity with the rest of the sector that has spawned them – they have their money, they're off and running. This is again understandable: when you're involved in producing a film you don't have time to think of much else and certainly not involve yourself in complex charitable moves as penance for having been successful. So there should be structures to allow an automatic expression of that solidarity, an automatic channelling of monies back into the technical base of the sector which will ensure the professional production of the lucky film-maker's project at the same time as helping someone else to get started on learning about the process.

We belong to a union with a high percentage of its members unemployed and live in a country with four million out of work. Of course the way forward is to try year by year to create more permanently waged jobs, but a year of somebody's life passes while that 'trying' is going on. If they want to get on and make some small project, at least we should ensure that the means are not restricted to those lucky enough to be in work. By creating 40-odd technician and administration jobs around the country over the next three or four years, we would be helping the widest possible number of people from the aristocracy of the sector to the humblest of waiters. The National Organisation of Workshops, the Independent Film and Video Makers Association, the Women's Film and Television Network, the Black Media Workers Association, the ACTT, Channel Four, the BFI and *all* other interested bodies and individuals should unite in a drive to set up a *real* production base for the whole sector and avoid the increasing divisions that the success of some and the frustrations of others are beginning to cause. The tactic of government in the eighties is to divide by giving to some and not to others: we must unite to help all and disadvantage none.

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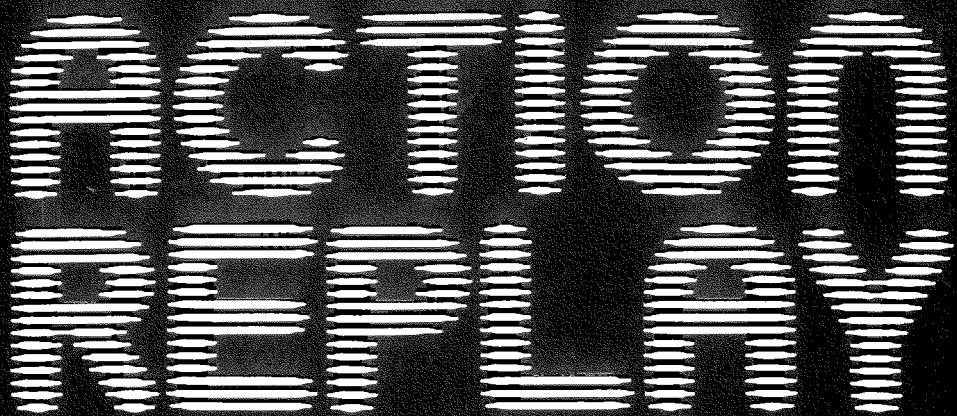
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AGAINST SEXUAL REPRESENTATION IN FILM

BY PETER GIDAL

[1] '...structurally men are the agents and beneficiaries of the subordination of women.' – Diana Leonard, preface to Christine Delphy's *Close to Home, A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression,* London, Hutchinson, 1984, p 12.

For objective dialectics the absolute is also to be found in the relative. The unity, the coincidence, identity, resultant force, of opposites, is conditional, temporary, transitory, and relative.

Lenin, 'On Dialectics', 1914

If women come out of the cinema feeling victimised then that is harm – you can't measure the norm. Men feel their own power enhanced.

Rachel and Sarah, Women Against Violence Against Women, LBC Radio London, September 30, 1982

THE VEHEMENT DETERMINATION in patriarchy to reproduce the oppression of women in the interests of male power exists in all social practices. There is no social space which is somehow exempt from the however contradictory power-relations that capitalist patriarchy is predicated upon, and which it reproduces if it is to reproduce its interests.[1] Thus the necessary institutions of oppression 'must' be constantly reproduced; the reproduction of male power in *representation* is one instance.

Representation has been taken to mean 'the ideological' as if somehow the ideological were not itself a material practice, as if the ideological were not a state apparatus, state apparatuses. Of course, 'state apparatus' is a concept that needs modification from the Althusserian definition if it is not to become totally identified with the state structure as is. In a sense, the *state* is not the final determinant of the structures of ideology nor it is necessarily always the primary structure which gives identity to the current ideological forces, as the sphere of the so-called 'private' is imbricated in, and reproductive of, specific *ideologies*. Thus, for example, the ideology and politics of private and 'free' enterprise are in some nations bases for the ideological state apparatuses, but in others the ideology of private and 'free' individualism is *countered* by the ideological state apparatuses (i.e. in socialist states). Be that as it may, the point of

all this is to state(!) that representation is ideological, is a material prac-
tice, is political.

The images and sounds which you see and hear and which position
you in your unconscious and conscious relations of meaning and know-
ledge and 'truth' and 'nature' are, precisely, images and sounds as
material,-both in the orthodox sense of mechanistic materiality (light,
grain, tone, volume, timbre, duration, etc) and in the dialectical sense of
the *social*-material in problematic relation to (its) *attempted* represent-
ation. Films that do not suppress either materiality have formed an
experimental/avant-garde practice in the last two decades, mainly in
Britain. Structural-materialist (and post-structural-materialist) film is a
concrete, theoretical, *filmic* practice. Such film is *social* as it is grain,
light, form, etc and equally and simultaneously projecting the processes
of representation and its attendant problematics. *Material* is thus to be
understood not as a (social) story or document, but rather: material as
social inasmuch as it is the *material* of attempted representation's *process*.
Such film is important in what it does *not represent*. The moment the
film represents, it isn't 'about' representation. In my film practice I
cannot make a film that is 'about' representation while simultaneously
allowing any representation to hold (thus giving itself as *natural*); yet
theoretically I can posit that such filmic represent*ing* can be dialectical
and historical when it problematises processes of representation.

What the films I am not describing but alluding to have an interest in,
which does not suppress their materialist practice, is a concern with how
the seen is not to be believed; how the seen is 'read'; how such light read-
ings are readings which have to be seen to not be believed; how such
succession of images in duration are not, is not, an unfolding, of
anything prior, anterior – not even sexuality; rather, a concretion of
obsessive processing. What the camera is aimed at (the profilmic) are not
overdetermining signifiers.[2]

The political question to be asked, and which has been asked in Britain
since the late 1960s, is how to not reproduce dominant relations in film.
The film-makers working around the London Film Makers Co-operative
who were concerned to have their experimental film practice not simply
become a 'different' style, or a private individualistic expression in
another form of (phallocentric) poesis, realised that the moment-to-
moment work with, on and through *process* (at *each* stage of film-making)
is the film. Thus no film, no representation, however 'later' analysed and
discussed in its specificity, could be separated from its imbrication in its
film processes – and thus a radical experimental film practice and proble-
matic was necessarily predicated upon the film as film *process*. The
processes of representation are the contradictory difficulties that occur
when at one and the same time attempting to represent and attempting
not to represent, not to hold any reproduction of the 'real social space'
(the profilmic space the camera is aimed at). Thus the viewer is forced
constantly to attempt to arrest the images, the structures, the meanings,
but can never produce a satisfaction, successful mimesis, identification or
possible consumption.

[2] Peter Gidal, 'British
Avant-Garde Film',
Undercut no 2, 1981,
p 5.

[3] Peter Gidal, 'On Julia Kristeva', *Undercut* nos 10/11, 1984, p 18.

Such cinematic representational practice was predicated upon the radical political position that to represent the sexual of 'men' and 'women' is to reproduce dominant sexual positions and meanings and relations. At this historical juncture, the overdetermining meanings and positions given by and through sexed figuration, in advertising, TV serials and plays on television, in photography, dominant cinema and so-called 'independent cinema', in dominant and 'alternative' theatre, in graphic illustration, etc, can only be adequately dealt with if a number of idealist notions (among others, *deconstruction*) are rejected. There are numerous ways in which films can reproduce the material ideological politics of the given capitalist-patriarchal structure; a number of styles are 'open' for use which films that oppose the definitions for a radical materialist practice constantly take up. Such films, which thereby take up a reactionary position, find 'different' *styles* which simply serve to codify existing representations (within their respective style), employing themselves as decoys and pretexts. Existing representations and social relations in representation are then *re*produced, through the perceptual iconography of the known (familiar, in both senses). To work against this effect certain dominant relations have to be *filmically* denied, and what must be recalled is that arguments against such denial (i.e. 'against repression') often forget that such a concept ('against repression') is itself *political*: whose repression? for whom? against whom? 'Against repression' as a concept must be questioned, as it disavows the existence of a political, sexual, economic *power*.[3]

The notion of deconstruction (another of the previously mentioned 'number of ways of reproducing the structure') filtered through from various academic positions which sought to leave things the way they are: the world of representation in sound and image would remain and then, after the fact, interpretation would deconstruct the meanings. Thus a whole school of bourgeois semiotics found a predetermined teleology (and many careers were founded as well). A next step in deconstructive analysis was that such interpretation be taken into the filmwork itself. Thus, instead of screening *Dressed to Kill* on a Steenbeck and interpreting deconstructive meanings ostensibly against dominant phallocracy, one would now build these into the work itself. A ready-made school of independent film-making (and an attendant academia) sprang up, in effect finding in such films built-in deconstructions that would rationalise and make *good objects* out of whatever representation was at hand. In what Lenin would have described as classic opportunism, certain analytic insights were constructed for past films (usually from the Hollywood model, along with early Dreyer, Lang, etc): deconstructions of the narrative sexual relations of family, of traditional roles of masculinity and femininity, of conventional narrative and narrativisation, etc. Such insights were then built into the ostensibly different or independent or 'new' filmworks, so that the selfsame bourgeois semioticians and academics previously content to describe ('textual analysis') the Hollywood good object as imbricated with contradictory and therefore 'critical' or 'challenging' constructions could now find a new rationale and good

conscience in reading out from new deconstructive films precisely the *same* analyses. (Constant, and endless, denial of the return of the same, in the interest of dominant pleasure and its power). Thus, the 'deconstructions' were no longer 'gaps' and 'contradictions'[4] in a classic film text, but rather the text itself had been 'reformed'.

This thus was the second stage defence against a radically materialist avant-garde.[5] Bourgeois representation of, for example, gender relations could now be found to be different – not simply after the fact on a Steenbeck (a perverse act of will in any case!) thereby justifying the capitalist/patriarchal good object as 'actually' contradictory, problematic and deconstructive of just such bourgeois relations. No, now such analyses could come directly from the perceptually and stylistically 'different' independent cinema which mechanistically built in the deconstructions and distanciations (often of a crude sub-Brechtian type) critics would then read out. The process and materiality of cinema, the apparatus in all its forms, was thereby annihilated. But, as in literature where this attitude began, these attempts at deconstruction served to reinvigorate dominant representations, dominant meanings, dominant spectatorial positions (of oppressed, and oppressor) under the cover of a new rationale.

The overdetermining dominant meanings of 'men' and 'women', the biologism and essentialising of the definitions, the power relations that are reproduced by representing them – these are the perceptual 'knowledges' that a radical film practice must militate against. The making and unmaking of meaning and meaninglessness, the constructedness of (the attempt at) each moment of reproduction and representation *and its impossibilities at each moment*, are inseparable from the filmic apparatus and process. The conflation of the perceived with 'truth' or 'knowledge' or 'nature' is opposed by a materialist film practice, not least in its positioning of the viewer/subject against the illusion of power *over* those meanings which they consume.

The paradox is that the *illusory* power given the viewer (as male) by filmic procedures of identification and narrative reproduces actual male power positions. The viewer must be positioned in constant unknowing, the not-knower, displaced, as a resistance *against*. Through that unknowing, through the impossibilities of transparent 'communication' which would obliterate the filmic process and its materialist functioning, the viewer-as-subject becomes positioned as necessarily productive. The production of meanings (and the contradictory struggles against pre-given meaning to be consumed) forces the viewer into a dialectical relation with the cinematic, and with the cinematic apparatus.[6] 'Identification: mental mechanism whereby the individual attains gratification, emotional support, relief from stress by consciously or unconsciously attributing to him/herself the characteristics of another person or a particular group' (*Webster's*). Against sexual identity would be, then, neither *difference* ('woman-as-other' against a (male) norm, outside language and power) nor *homogeneity* ('woman-as-same', assimilating the male role in patriarchy, identifying with it, such a role denying both women's subjec-

4 It's not that every representation doesn't have contradictions, but the classic text *contains* them, makes the contradictions invisible/seamless/in the interests of dominant oppressions, i.e. *material oppressions* (and their ideological powers)/*ideological oppressions* (that material).

5 Many of those who at one point wanted to make films that were 'deconstructive in themselves' (supposedly) went on to make more or less conventional cinematic product, with one eye on commerce and the other simply on avoidance of the day-to-day difficulties of working through an avant-garde/ experimental film practice.

6 Some of my films relate to these questions, specifically *Silent Partner* (1977) and *Room Film 1973* See Peter Gidal, 'Technology and Ideology in/through/ and Avant-Garde Film: An Instance', in Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (eds), *The Cinematic Apparatus*, London, Macmillan, 1980, pp 151-165.

[7] Such conceptualisation is both descriptive and prescriptive through its reproduction in language of that set of meanings and politics.

[8] Stephen Heath/Peter Gidal, *Cambridge Tapes* (unpublished taped discussion on narrative at Jesus College, Cambridge, March 1977).

[9] The demand is for a materialist analysis, to account for the historical independence of patriarchy and capitalism: 'Only then is it possible to establish the material basis for the connection between the struggle against patriarchy and the struggle against capitalism.' – Christine Delphy, *The Main Enemy*, Paris, Partisans, 1970; English translation Women's Research and Resource Centre pamphlet, London, 1977; also in Delphy, *Close to Home*, op cit.

[10] Peter Gidal, 'The Anti-Narrative (1978)', *Screen* Summer 1979, vol 20 no 2, p 88.

[11] Mary Ann Doane, 'Women's Stake: Filming the Female Body', *October* no 17, Summer 1981, pp 23-24.

tive and objective histories, ideologies, powers.)[7]

The lack of representation of the male and female body, let alone any narratives and narrativisations which are motored by such, means unpleasure (a different kind of pleasure) in instanciated by such cinematic practices. The representation of the male and female, and the situating of the male and female viewer *in* representation, and the depiction of male and female sexuality (whatever that is) is the ideological mode of reproducing dominant relations, no matter what the 'actual' narrative ostensibly is. Because the seen, and the scene, that we re-witness, is the reproduction of positions of secure perception as to the sexualised body, that body as always the *other* against which the sexual identity of the 'I' is reproduced, in the interests of patriarchal relations as much as the reproduction of the labour power necessary for capitalist relations. We see a man and a woman on screen and we can begin at that first stage of perception to identify what is, and then identify with/through that representation.[8] Thus the narrative of patriarchal power relations, and dominant oppressions, is set up at the initial perception stage, because the recognition of the known, and the conflation of the known with the real, the real with the true, and the whole family romance with the place for the viewer-as-subject somewhere in that, means that thereafter whatever interpretations and differences the narrative has to offer, it is still predicated upon the acceptance of the (natural, pregiven, pregiven-as-natural) existence of the sexed role and position of, and towards, the represented men and women on-screen in-frame. What is (pre)given to that scopophilia is given as natural to it: an ideological operation.[9]

We need a concept of the materiality of ideology that understands that such representation is an immediate positioning of the viewer within a certain political relation.[10] 'For it is precisely the massive reading, writing, filming, of the female body which constructs and maintains a hierarchy along the lines of a sexual difference assumed as natural. The ideological complicity of the concept of the natural dictates the impossibility of a nostalgic return to an unwritten body.'[11]

The positions that are given for the retention and reproduction of male (and men's) power are given precisely through dominant pleasures, consumption instigated by the ideological material of represent*ings* every moment of/in our social existence. These meanings cannot simply be critiqued as if that were enough (interpreting the world, we certainly know, is not to change it). We have to produce different positions in our representational practices, and such a beginning of a different position is one which does not reproduce the empirical real as real, does not give perception the status of truth, does not reproduce certain perceptions at all, precisely because of the overdetermined codified meanings that prevail.

There is no law that says everything must be represented and then interpreted differently (and if there were it would have to be broken); nor is there a law that says that not to represent certain narratives is to deny their existence. Rather, it is to produce other presentations and processes, so that no 'existence' is given at all, no 'meaning' is given at all,

nothing is given outside of its being/having been constructed, so that any position taken and produced is precisely that: produced, the product of labour, of politics, of ideology, of power. The structurings of a materialist procedural practice which deny the reproduction and representation of the meaningful, narrative, sexuality, are structurings that position the viewer against the dominant power, in *resistance*. Of course, for those who deny, or love, capitalism's oppression of the mass of men and women, and patriarchy's oppression of all women, there is absolutely no need for anything but what already is, with the odd stylistic difference to reinvigorate and renew the present cinematic structures, to facilitate their consumption, avoiding at all costs the production of struggle and the production through contradictions and struggles of a different power relation.

Another problem is that women who have relationships with men can only go so far and they then have to stop or they couldn't live with the idea. They couldn't go on sleeping with men. And they have to go on sleeping with men, for all sorts of reasons (they can't be blamed for that) because they're constructed that way. Well, let's not say that: we're constructed that way. But in any case it becomes an unbearable contradiction if you take it to its logical conclusion. Because then you start questioning everything you do and you can't go on living [....] Heterosexuality as a sort of cosmic heterosexuality is absolutely coterminus with a basic world view which not only hasn't been put into question, but if it were put into question everything would crumble down ... nobody would know who they are. You can call into question your class and ethnic identification without eliminating your sense of self. But if people are not men and women anymore, then they don't know who they are. No identity. It's not a personal problem of not having any other identity. The problem is that no other personal identity exists [...] because it is built on the basis of gender identity [....] Attacking sexuality [....] is in the end attacking the assumption that men and women are complementary somehow, at some very basic level. And that basic level is represented by coitus [....] When one questions that, one questions everyone's identity. People cannot afford to be left without an identity, so we cannot approach a question that might lead to that.[12]

Film works that do not arrest, return, and hold the viewer (in his/her conscious and unconscious positioning) to a sexual identity[13] are predicated upon and operate through processes radically opposed to sexual representation.[14]

[12] Christine Delphy, interviewed by Laura Cottingham, 'What is Feminism', *Off Our Backs*, March 1984.

[13] One issue is how the viewer is not necessarily or always a man (or a 'man'); that phallocentric view of knowledge is the hold of the cinematic, the break of which is political.

[14] See also Stephen Heath: 'Afterword', *Screen* Summer 1979, vol 20 no 2, pp 93-99; and 'Repetition Time: Notes Around Structual/Materialist Film' in his *Questions of Cinema*, London, Macmillan, 1981, pp 165-175.

'THOSE OTHER VOICES'
AN INTERVIEW WITH PLATFORM FILMS
BY SYLVIA HARVEY

PLATFORM FILMS (Geoff Bell, Chris Reeves, Lin Solomon and John Underhay) was established in 1982 to make the documentary film *The Cause of Ireland*, which was broadcast on Channel Four on October 3, 1983, and won the Tyne Award at the 1983 Newcastle Film Festival. The film examines the relevance of James Connolly's analysis of Irish history that 'the cause of labour is the cause of Ireland'; it represents the views of working class Catholics and Protestant loyalists in the North of Ireland, and explores the relationship between Irish republicanism and socialism.

Members of Platform have also worked on the following: *Home Soldier Home* (Chris Reeves, 1978), a film about the anti-working class nature of the British army and its colonial involvements including Northern Ireland; *The Lucas Aerospace Tape* (video, student collective, Royal College of Art, 1978), about the corporate plan developed by trade unionists at Lucas to turn military production into socially useful forms of production; *H Block Hunger Strike* (Chris Reeves, 1980), distributed by the Irish solidarity movement in Britain and also shown on Russian television; *A Free Country* (Lin Solomon, 1983), an examination of the effects of the Prevention of Terrorism Act on the Irish community in Britain. Geoff Bell worked as a freelance researcher for television from 1970 to 1982, and is the author of *The Protestants of Ulster* (Pluto Press, 1976); *Troublesome Business: The Labour Party and the Irish Question* (Pluto Press, 1982); *The British in Ireland* (Pluto, 1984).

Since the completion of *The Cause of Ireland*, the members of Platform Films have worked with other groups and individuals to produce and distribute the Miners' Campaign Videotapes as a contribution to the 1984 strike.

Sylvia Harvey: *How did the project, The Cause of Ireland, begin and why did you choose this particular subject?*

Chris Reeves: We decided to make a film about Ireland because, through our involvement in the labour movement, it was obvious that

the issue was perceived by many as being very problematic. Yet we would argue that the North of Ireland should be a central question for the British labour movement. For instance, there is a whole section of the working class there that have been won over by the Unionists into believing that their interests lie in uniting with the people who rule over them. This is very dangerous for socialists, and it would be wrong to imagine that such a trend is confined to the North of Ireland. The same tendency, although to a lesser degree, is present in the English working class.

That, perhaps, is rather theoretical, but there are a host of other reasons for presenting, on television, a socialist view of what is happening in Ireland. What you are seeing there is part of a supposed western liberal democratic state with the kid gloves off. Accordingly, the escalation of state repression that has occurred in the North of Ireland since 1969 is extremely relevant for everyone in this country, for it could well be targeted against the working class here. This prophecy of doom has been made repeatedly over the years, but with the policing the miners' strike experienced, who would say such a warning today is mere left-wing rhetoric?

There were other factors in making the film. There is the problem of national chauvinism and anti-Irish racism within the British working class; there is the need to tackle a number of misconceptions about the situation there – like the belief that the British Army is a peacekeeping force. And, finally, there is the view that the whole Irish national question should be avoided by progressives and socialists, that bread and butter issues should be pursued so that the working class can unite, that in this way the national question can be left for resolution in the future. Our view is contrary to such opinions, and instead, we would argue the struggle for socialism and the national question are inseparable.

Geoff Bell: *The Cause of Ireland* had a further motivation. There was a need to challenge the usual media treatment of the North of Ireland. The fact is that this was the first film to appear on British television in 14 years which suggested that British withdrawal might be a good thing. From that consideration, not only was the film overdue, but it should also be remembered that it was a reflection of a sentiment which is strongly held within the North of Ireland and, according to opinion polls, has majority support within both the South of Ireland and Britain.

One of the things that struck me most when I saw the film was the amount of time you spent interviewing loyalists, which, I think, was an important thing for progressive film-makers to do. It also struck me that there was an emphasis on speaking to working class people, Catholic and Protestant. Usually, so much of the material seems to be interviews with political leaders or academics, but you went into the working class communities. Could you say a little about this method of putting the film together?

Chris Reeves: On the issue of the Protestants, this is something social-

The Cause of Ireland: ` ... division within the loyalist community ... '.

ists in England tend to avoid. They either ignore the million Protestants in the North of Ireland, or they are dismissed as a homogeneous, reactionary bloc. Our understanding was that this issue had to be confronted because it comes up time and time again when Ireland is discussed within the labour movement. Also, since 1969, the Unionist monolith has fragmented and there is increasing division within the loyalist community which, sociologically speaking, approximates to class divisions, and which therefore needs examining. We also hoped that because the film was being shown on television it could have some influence, however small, on the protestant community in the North.

John Underhay: On the avoidance of standard public figures, the decision there was quite simple. We believed that certain people, such as John Hume, Ian Paisley, the Northern Ireland Secretaries of State, have been over-represented in the media. We wanted to bias the exposure to those other voices which are rarely represented. And that included working class loyalists.

Objectivity and bias is a tricky area because the mass media in this country in news and current affairs largely depend upon the convention or rule of neutrality and impartiality. It always seemed to me that there are some questions on which one would not wish to be neutral or impartial.

Chris Reeves: We would not say we were impartial. We identify with the political, economic and social interests of the working class.

Geoff Bell: This sense of identification also informs our attitudes to reportage and filming. There are two ways in which television conventionally approaches working people. One is the inquisitional and aggressive approach—the way that strikers are out up against the wall and called upon to explain themselves. The other is an approach I was involved with in the early '70s, when I was in Belfast and some TV programme would 'phone me and say they were having a discussion on Northern Ireland and wanted me to get five typical Protestants and five typical Catholics to the studio. So I would do that and David Frost or someone would come along and fire questions at them for half an hour. Now that, to those people, as indeed it would be to most people, was a very difficult situation. First, they were physically cut off from their community, in alien surroundings. Second, they were competing with each other. The method adopted in *The Cause of Ireland* was very different. People were interviewed by themselves, or in the presence of their friends. They were interviewed in their own homes, or where they worked, or in their clubs. They were interviewed sympathetically and for a long period of time. Consequently a much more authentic voice came through, because those being interviewed were not on the defensive all the time.

There are people who can be very clear about what they think, but once a tape recorder or camera is turned on, or when a stranger comes in, they become very nervous. Did you develop methods for dealing with that?

Chris Reeves: When interviewing working class people we always expressed our class interest from the start. Whereas a standard BBC approach would be what I would describe as patronising and pretending objectivity, we told people we had a socialist perspective. This tended to put people at their ease, whether or not they themselves were socialists. It should be remembered that the media have been a constant presence in the North of Ireland since 1968, that few there think very much of the way the situation has been reported, and that accordingly both loyalists and nationalists have a healthy suspicion that they are seen as little more than objects to be exploited. Because we laid our cards on the table from the start people tended to be more open with us in return. Working class people in the North of Ireland are angry that their voices have not been heard, and so when someone offers them the opportunity to rectify this they are willing to take risks.

Sometimes, when people make a documentary they start with a definite idea about what they believe to be the truth of the situation, and then they go out and interview people. One of the things that struck me about the film was that it seemed to contain a series of tightly organised investigations. That I thought was a strength of the film. But what I would like to ask is to what

extent you had already sketched out what the film was going to say before you made it, and to what extent the process of going out and doing the work confirmed or changed your initial suppositions?

Chris Reeves: We had a theoretical appraisal of what was happening in the North of Ireland, based on our own experiences of living or going there, and on raising and discussing the issue within the British labour movement. So our understanding was based on experience, as well as on theory and research. But yes, we did have a framework when we approached the project, we didn't go to the North in a blank way.

But how far did the actual process of investigation change what you originally set out to say?

Geoff Bell: There were new experiences which added to the film's original concept. For instance, there is the growing distrust of Britain by many Protestants. Now this aspect of contemporary Protestant political consciousness was not an essential ingredient of the argument we initially wanted to present. Nor was the fact that we came across and reported Protestant republicans. But what both these did do was to reinforce our argument.

Lin Solomon: Similarly with the fact that the republican movement itself was very critical of the government in the 26 counties, on so-called 'women's issues' as well as in a more general sense.

Geoff Bell: The point is that we didn't make the film with the firm intention of a) saying we must find Protestants who don't trust Britain; b) we must show Protestant republicans; c) we must discover republicans who are critical of the South. All these came about in the course of the filming process, although, of course, it did strengthen the film, and it did add weight to what we were trying to say.

*The film demonstrates that the notion of a homogeneous bloc of Unionists is no longer true. So there is change developing there and I have always been interested in what Brecht said, that cultural producers have a responsibility to represent the world as changing and therefore changeable. That is to say, in showing that the world does change you give the audience the sense that they can change it too. You can produce a slightly more hopeful approach to a problem. One of the major difficulties in representing Northern Ireland, it seems to me, is that it has been largely represented in tragic terms. That is to say that it is presented as a desperate and insoluble problem. I wonder if that tragic element partly explains why it is that when people are asked what sort of programme they would like to see **less** of, they say 'Northern Ireland', 'We don't want to know'.*

Chris Reeves: It is true that most representations of the present situation in the North of Ireland tend to pose the problem as insoluble.

Even historical series like *The Troubles* which showed the historical processes as changing and changeable did, in the end, when dealing with the present day, present the problem as insoluble. In fact, the last episode of *The Troubles* was entitled *Deadlock*, to illustrate this point. We also knew from our experience within the left in this country that many would acquiesce to the view of the insolubility of the problem. That was why it was important to show that the Republican movement had developed and that the Protestant community could change its view-point.

Geoff Bell: Of course what the film also illustrated is that one of the major reasons why people change is because they are involved in struggle. This is certainly why Sinn Fein has moved to the left in recent years – the last ten years have taught them that simply waving a green flag is insufficient.

Lin Solomon: The fact that *The Cause of Ireland* showed such changing processes and the fact that this won a level of appreciation is evident in the response we got to the TV screening. The 'phone calls began 15 minutes into the film and in the days immediately following we received over a hundred letters. Many more followed. And, as for people not wanting to know about the situation in Ireland, working class people, many of the bookings we have had for the film since are from trades councils, local labour parties and other working class organisations. So I wonder whether it might not be the case that if people want to see less about Ireland on TV, what they want to see less of is what is usually presented. And I would also question the notion that watching TV is necessarily passive.

What was the range of response in the letters?

Chris Reeves: They went from death threats from extreme loyalists to well-argued and detailed critiques by anti-republicans, both Protestant and Catholic, including representatives of all the major political parties in the North of Ireland. There were many letters from people in England, many who felt that the programme had given them a lot of historical information they had lacked. Overall, breaking-down these letters and 'phone calls it was about 50/50 for and against. There was also a *Right to Reply* programme devoted to the film, and there was a subsequent debate on it in several issues of *Fortnight*, the leading independent North of Ireland review.

John Underhay: The active response to the film as opposed to the disinterest people generally have in Ireland, illuminates quite well the difference between our approach and that of the normal, no hope, no change type of programme.

Chris Reeve: TV broadcasts do not have to be passive, although a lot of

people within the independent film sector tend to dismiss TV as imply-
ing passivity on the part of the audience. Our experience is very
different. In following up the calls and letters we entered into a political
dialogue with people who may never think of going to a political
meeting.

Lin Solomon: We do believe it is important to make films that work on
TV, that are accessible to a broad audience as well as a theatrical one, or a
committed one.

*There has been a lot of discussion in the independent film sector over the last
ten years or so about formal questions, about what means are to be adopted
when putting together images and sounds. There has been in some quarters
support for, let's call it, the necessity for experimentation. Your film is not
an experimental one, although it is innovative, particularly around the
question of class and class voice.*

Lin Solomon: I've never really understood why a film which uses a
'conventional form' has necessarily to be reactionary. Or that putting
forward progressive or innovative content within the 'conventions' of
documentary must mean that the ideas themselves are prevented from
taking root because of a supposed 'reactionary' or 'conventional' form
which has been adopted. That is to put form on a pedestal, and to make
the formal structure the holy of holies. What can happen is that those
who can appreciate formal experimentation in film are those in that one
and a half per cent of the population which has access to all the contexts
and educational institutions in which these ideas operate.

*Clearly there are many experimental or avant-garde films that are extremely
difficult to understand and that have a limited and restrictive class address,
seeking and finding the ghettoes of the radical intelligentsia. But it may be
useful to separate out the issues of difficulty, class experience, class address
and experimentation. So that instead of rejecting either 'formal experiment'
or 'conventional form' in general, we ask specifically and in each case
whether the experimental or conventional forms adopted facilitate effective
communication of the social analysis intended by the film. Of course
'effective communication' is itself both a political and controversial concept
(from whom? to whom? with what purpose?), and it can only be evaluated in
relationship to dominant forms of communication, and generally held,
common sense modes of understanding of the world; communication never
takes place in a vacuum but within a particular context of communicative
forms and class relations. How do you see the relationship between the
method you adopt to represent the world and your social purpose and class
allegiance?*

Geoff Bell: Perhaps I can add that we are and have been people who are
involved in class politics, and in many ways we put that first. We see film
as a means of getting across ideas which we feel strongly about; to open

up a dialogue around issues; to bring these ideas and issues into the public arena. Consequently, we engage in ways of making film that will be readily comprehensible to a mass audience. Which is why we do not subscribe to a preoccupation with formal experimentation.

How do you see your relationship to the independent film sector, both posit- ively and negatively? Is there a sense in which you were only able to do what you did with film because of the existence of the independent sector?

Chris Reeves: A space has been carved out by the organisations that have grown up within the independent film sector which does, in a sense, allow our kind of work to go forward, even exist. On the other hand our ideological relationship with probably the larger part of the independent film sector is not without problems, primarily because of our view that form should allow maximum clarity in terms of political ideas. There are many in the independent sector who would consider themselves socialist but who would not agree with us on this. If I can summarise our basic argument, it begins with an obvious recognition that in Britain today the major issue is politics, not something called 'film'. And this applies to socialist film-makers as well as everyone else. This is not Russia in the 1920s. It is not a post-revolutionary period that allows people's creativity to bloom and all manner of experimentation to test the sense of the imagination. In Britain today there is a bitter, vicious class struggle taking place, and given the limited resources there is a necessity to prioritise, to define what those priorities are and to proceed on that basis. Any formal means which are employed which can obscure the message that needs to be put across have to be avoided.

Can we continue this question of your relationship to the independent sector by asking where you come from and what kind of institutions formed you?

Lin Solomon: I started out as a photographic student at the London College of Printing. In my second year I turned to film and went on to take an MA at the Royal College of Art.

Chris Reeves: I also studied at the Royal College of Art and at St Martin's.

Geoff Bell: I suppose the fact that I am Irish has shaped me more than anything. I was born and brought up in Belfast and took a degree in history and politics from Trinity College, Dublin. I have worked on socialist newspapers, written a couple of books and done research for a number of TV programmes.

John Underhay: I have been active politically, especially around the Irish issue. That has given me an insight into the difficulties and doubts people have in Britain about Ireland. This experience was very useful in making *The Cause of Ireland*, for it enabled me to refer back to popularly held perceptions and misconceptions.

*It is very important to try and have an idea of what is already in the heads of your audience. If you do not know what the common arguments are, or what kinds of information or misinformation people have, you cannot really know how to pitch the issue when trying to reach the people you want to. I suppose that one of the greatest faults of left intellectuals in the '70s was a desire to refine ideas to make them absolutely scientific, absolutely precise, absolutely correct, but somehow missing out on the most simple and fundamental of all propositions – that unless true ideas are held by millions of people they are, in reality, useless. That's why the question of **how** you address people seems to be extremely important. It is just not good enough to be right, you've also got to be convincing. So your experience of political work is very important in giving you that sense of an audience.*

Chris Reeves: My own particular interest in film, in conjunction with my political involvement, has produced rather an uneasy relationship with the institutions where I was taught the formal aspects of film-making. I found that there were few people who shared the analysis that film could be an asset in the general struggle for socialism. This has produced an uneasy relationship with the funding institutions who would seem to be more concerned with developing independent film as an art form, rather than seeing film as having a more general role within society. There are also those who would argue that a progressive approach to film-making involves almost slipping in a political message to whatever cultural artifact you are working on – so that you creep up on people by stealth. We hold the contrary view: that a successful independent film is one where the political position adopted is very clear. That way people have something to agree or disagree with.

Geoff Bell: Which is not to say that a film should be blinkered or didactic. In *The Cause of Ireland* we did not blank out views which we disagreed with. Loyalist views were put forward. If the British Army had agreed, we would have interviewed them as well. It's not a matter of excluding views; what the film did was to show how we arrived at the argument which we put forward.

The independent sector, particularly around the debates during the setting up of the Fourth Channel, tended very much to identify with minority opinions. It was argued that one of the reasons why a new TV channel was needed was to express minority views, and very often this was connected with progressive arguments about a voice for women (not a minority), for black people, for gays. I can see how, in many respects, that was a progressive argument, but earlier you talked about the working class who are the majority, and about a commitment to the interests of the majority. This commitment entails an opposition to the minority that rules, that owns and controls the means of production. Could you elaborate on this?

Lin Solomon: The working class is not a homogeneous mass, it is made up of women, black people, gay people, etc. But what can unite these people is a common interest in seeing that their class control the means

'If the British Army had agreed, we would have interviewed them. . . . '

of production.

Lenin talked about the necessity of developing an independent party of the working class, and this notion of independence is very important. First, because it connects the term with class and class interests, second because it raises the question about the extent to which the existing political parties in Britain express and reflect the interests of the working class.

Geoff Bell: There are, of course, different meanings attached to the word 'independence'. Now as far as film-makers or other cultural workers go I would question whether 'independence' exists. There is always a taking of sides – the side of the ruling class or the side of the working class. Even if one tries to be neutral or 'balanced', that in itself involves making a whole series of value judgements, the chief one of which is to imply that both sides in the argument have an equal weight, therefore they are given equal time. But as socialists we don't see it like that. We say the majority are being robbed by a minority, and that therefore we will make films that will argue for a rectification of that. Where the difficulty arises is in the working out of that exercise, and this ties up with your comments about an adequate political organisation of the working class. We are all members of the Labour Party but we would agree that it is hardly the independent party of the working class which

socialists have striven for. Therefore, ideologically speaking, we would keep a formal distance from it. The problem then arises of how exactly do we identify in detail working class interests, for what needs to be avoided above all is to become the 'independent' left intellectual preaching to the working class from above.

Would it be fair to say that you want to be critical, but not sectarian, because the history of the British left is one of sectarianism?

Lin Solomon: Being a member of an organisation like the Labour Party, and working for that party does evoke a right to be critical of it, and that indeed is a necessary ingredient of participatory democracy.

Geoff Bell: The only class unity which is worth anything is one that is formed through discussion and criticism within the class, and through arriving at a decision democratically within a particular organisation, and then acting upon it. Within the western socialist movement there has been a great fear of internal criticism, a worry that criticism leads to factions, leads to sectarianism, leads to splits. And that indeed has happened, but this doesn't mean that all debate and discussion should therefore be banned. What is needed is a system of working class organisation which allows criticism and discussion and allows it to happen in a healthy way, so that everyone is educated in the process. For instance we are quite willing to make films which are critical of the leadership of working class organisation, but we do so with the intention of improving those organisations, not destroying them.

There have been some proposals from progressive sections within the independent film movement that film-makers should seek more and more to work within the organisations of the labour movement. This raises the whole issue of sponsorship, and your attitude to that.

Chris Reeves: We would doubt whether it would be possible to have an unproblematic economic tie with existing mass organisations of the working class. Both the Labour Party and the trades unions have problems connected with internal democracy, and what an economic relationship with such an organisation could mean is that you produce what a small leadership clique within that organisation tells you to produce.

Doesn't that condemn cultural producers to silence: having the right ideas but being unable to communicate them? Would you not want to support in principle the desirability of being sponsored by and economically supported by working class organisations, while accepting that you might have reservations about the resulting relationship?

Chris Reeves: In the last ten years there have not been many examples of progressive film-makers being directly sponsored by trade unions or

the Labour Party. In the last couple of years there has, it is true, been some change of heart, a developing consciousness among people in those organisations that the dissemination of ideas and information is important, and that film could be useful in this process. So the possibility may be there for progressive film-makers establishing links with the unions and the Labour Party, and it is obviously a possibility worth examining. Indeed, we were among a group of independent film-makers who have produced a series of videos on behalf of the miners' strike and were instrumental in getting the project off the ground. The project was endorsed by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and part financed by other unions. But the issues involved in that strike are, for us, relatively straightforward. And, perhaps more importantly, we have full confidence in the NUM leadership. But that type of situation is not repeated every day and we can think of many disputes in recent years where the leadership have been part of the problem, so any endorsement or sponsorship on those occasions would have been enormously difficult. So, as a group we take our mandate from the labour movement, while maintaining that because of our political position we would tend to reject direct sponsorship if it meant we were no more than the mouthpiece of Labour or trade union leaderships.

There are trade union leaders who express views that, in your opinion, are not in the interests of the working class and it would be a contradiction in terms for you to propagate those views?

Chris Reeves: We might go further than that and say there are crucial issues which need to be faced, such as the role of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) leadership, democracy within the Labour Party, the often stifling and deadening function the Parliamentary Labour Party performs. To actually deal with these issues, and we believe they need to be dealt with, while at the same time being sponsored by those we are critical of would be naively hopeful. The type of programmes Ken Loach, for instance, has made on the issues of leadership in the working class could in no way have been funded by the TUC or Labour Party.

Lin Solomon: He has also had difficulty with the broadcasting institutions over these films.[1] It is not only the trade union leaders who appear in his films who have given him trouble. So, of course, the relationship with a broadcasting body can be just as problematic as one with unions. It would be hoped that, on some occasions, such difficulties could be overcome by negotiation. There are also, however, the more practical problems. Trade unions and the Labour Party are not the richest of organisations. We still do not have a daily Labour paper, and we are talking about funding films.

Geoff Bell: The other point that has to be made concerns the nature of trade unions. The whole history of the British labour movement is that, from a trade union point of view, it has been tremendously strong, but,

[1] First, the Independent Broadcasting Authority demanded changes to 'balance' Loach's series *Questions of Leadership*. Then, in August '84, the producing company Central Television announced that their lawyers had advised that the programmes were potentially defamatory (of particular trade union officials) and would not be offered to Channel 4.

by comparison, politically it has been very weak and vacillating. And the films we would want to make would deal with political issues. On the other hand, there have been some interesting developments recently. There is the Labour Party's sponsorship of the *New Socialist* in which a wide variety of socialist and labour, often conflicting, views have been expressed. That has been very encouraging for those of us who believe that a socialist culture should not all be about preaching of the given party line. So, of course, it is worth while testing out labour movement sponsorship but, at this time, it is not the complete answer to all the difficulties socialist film-makers face.

These problems are related to the history of political institutions in this country, and the failure of the Labour Party to consistently develop anti-capitalist policies. You've been expressing some reservations about the possibility of working with trade union sponsorship, but I expect you would also want to avoid the all too frequent historical fate of independent film-makers, namely, that of complete isolation. So how do you see a strategy for your future work?

Chris Reeves: We would approach all those organisations, be they broadcasting institutions, state film-funding bodies or labour movement organisations, with whom we feel we can come to some kind of under-standing. But if it came to a situation where the conditions imposed on us by a funding organisation were such that they would result in something that was counter-productive or had reactionary implications, then we would not engage in that kind of economic relationship.

Why did you accept a commission from Channel Four?

Chris Reeves: The history of the emergence of Channel Four was one in which the independent film sector played quite a significant role. As a consequence there was a provision built into the Channel's brief for productions by the sector. That was an opportunity for people like our-selves; and our experience of working for the Channel was that there was little, if any, restrictions imposed on us in the production process, and there was no attempt at political censorship by the Channel. Where the problems did emerge was with the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) who requested to see the film, before it was broadcast, because Ireland is seen as a 'contentious' issue. They demanded cuts, and although we attempted to strike up a dialogue with the IBA they declined to write to us, or even discuss it with us on the telephone, prior to the broadcast.

So it was an invisible censor?

Chris Reeves: Yes, but the cuts they demanded were very specific and it was made clear to us that if they weren't made the film wouldn't go out. It wasn't a question of them putting their opinion to us and then us

to them. We were even told the name of the film that would be broadcast instead of ours if we didn't toe the line.

Lin Solomon: So we made a decision to accept the cuts.

Geoff Bell: The other thing to be remembered about the whole censorship process was that when the film was being made, certainly when I was writing the commentary, I was always aware that censorship could arise. The whole history of televising Ireland on British TV suggested as much. Accordingly there was always the thought at the back of our minds, when making the film, 'How much can we get away with?' So there is the whole familiar question of self-censorship.

What were the cuts?

Lin Solomon: The film was seen first by the lower echelons in the IBA. Apparently they thought the burning of the Union Jack at the end of the film should go and that, in general, they complained that the film didn't portray the 'murderous role' of the IRA. Then the film was seen by the top people at the IBA. They asked for a completely different set of cuts. These were (a) an interview with a representative of the Confederation of British Industries who claimed the situation in the North of Ireland was perfectly normal, inter-cut with a woman describing how her kids were stopped and searched by the British Army; (b) a fox-hunting sequence showing the life-style of the squires of County Down – accompanied by the satirical Behan song 'The Captains and the Kings'; (c) a commentary cut: 'For, while the firepower of Republicans is usually aimed at the security forces or public representatives of the British state, loyalist violence has been indiscriminately directed at the Catholic community'; (d) a further commentary cut: 'those Protestants who have been trained in the Ulster Defence Regiment, or the RUC would remain a real threat to Catholics' (in the event of British withdrawal).

In our view the visual cuts indicated a class problem, in that the didn't want the ruling class made fools of. The commentary cuts were a bit of tokenism as the film as a whole managed to say similar things elsewhere. So it seems the real stumbling block was the class rather than the Republican issue.

I should also add that a rider went out before the film was shown saying that the *Eleventh Hour* series on Channel Four – the slot for the film – was the place where independent film-makers had a chance to put their own point of view. This was an act of disassociation by the Channel, and although we asked that it was added that the film had been censored by the IBA they didn't agree to that.

John Underhay: After the showing I wrote a letter to David Glencross of the IBA asking on what grounds they had cut the film. His reply said there were factual inaccuracies – which just wasn't true – and referred us to a page of IBA guidelines which we were supposed to have contra-

THE TIMES DIARY

View hullaballoo!

Complaints by Richard Gordon, director of the Confederation of British Industry in Northern Ireland, and his friend William Montgomery, Master of the North Down Harriers, about the television film *The Cause of Ireland* have started a ding-dong battle between the Independent Broadcasting Authority and the makers of the programme.

The film, a historical survey of the blighted province, appeared on Channel 4 on Monday with four sections cut after the two men complained to the IBA. The most colourful section was a sequence inside Montgomery's country home with the master in full fox-hunting regalia.

Like Gordon, whose interview by Platform Films was similarly cut at the insistence of the IBA, Montgomery felt that he was deceived about the nature of the film and the part he would play in it. A businessman and farmer, he discovered that the film-makers had attached a rebel song about landowners as a sound track to his appearance. He tells me he had understood that the film would he about signs of a return to normality in Ulster.

Channel 4 has informed Christopher Reeves of Platform Films that the two sequences, together with two unrelated sections of commentary, contravened the IBA's television programme guidelines. Reeves, aged 30, who denies that underhand practices were used in the making of his epic, is now demanding a full explanation from the IBA.

From the *Times*, October 6, 1983.

vened. Ironically, it was under a heading which talked about matters of 'personal opinion'.

Chris Reeves: To be fair, leaving aside the role of the IBA I think we would all agree that working on a commission for Channel Four was a positive experience. Perhaps we were just fortunate in having a commissioning editor who was prepared to fund a film which dealt with a 'difficult' issue, and which put forward a particular and, to some, an almost heretical view of the North of Ireland. And perhaps we were fortunate as well that Jeremy Isaacs, the head of Channel Four, does hold a personal conviction that the issue of Ireland should be looked at on television, from a variety of viewpoints. But for us the most positive experience of all was that a film that argued for British withdrawal from Ireland was allowed to go out after fifteen years of trying, that we were involved in that victory, and that the type of film which is usually restricted to left-wing meetings in the upstairs room in pubs reached in one showing perhaps half-a-million people, the majority of whom would not normally go to a left-wing meeting or read the left press.

To go back to the question I asked at the beginning about why you decided on this particular subject of Ireland: would you agree that the attitude of the British labour movement to Ireland is only one example of a general problem, that of national chauvinism? There is, for example, the support given by the labour movement to the Falklands/Malvinas war.

'The enemies ... become the "Argies", the Irish, the Libyans. ... '

Geoff Bell: Yes, this does come back to what we were suggesting earlier, specifically about the political weakness of the British working class. The Labour Party and trade union support for that war, although of course there were exceptions, illustrated one aspect of that weakness – the tendency to allow national chauvinism, xenophobia and racism to obscure class interests. In our view unless this is tackled, challenged and defeated then the whole idea of socialist progress in this country will always remain an idea. Because it will allow the ruling class to argue that the 'country' should be put before class. The enemies thus become the 'Argies', the Irish, the Libyans, or indeed the nasty, greedy, striking miners who are holding 'the nation' to ransom.

Chris Reeves: There have been concrete historical conditions which have shaped the working class movement and its consciousness in this country. And these are inseparably bound up with Britain's imperial past. The fact that this imperial past was reaching its zenith when the working class was reaching its maturity has had very profound ramifications, not least the fact that working class militancy was limited, and to some extent controlled, by the offering of a few crumbs from the imperialist bounty. Racism and national chauvinism have therefore a lot to do with the imperialist past, and that this unsavoury inheritance can still be drummed up was evident in the Falklands War. So, to repeat, as film-makers we continue to see these sorts of issues as ones which we

Lin Solomon: Something also needs to be said about the failure of the women's movement to challenge past imperialist adventures and wars. Prior to the First World War there was a massive and militant push for women's suffrage, but when the war broke out it went into voluntary liquidation, and leaders of the suffrage movement (with some important exceptions) ended up handing out white feathers to conscientious objectors. The women's movement has reaped a bitter harvest because of that.

Geoff Bell: Can I just add that the judgements we are stating here, the views we are expressing do not come magically out of our heads. We talked earlier about our relationship with the labour movement and of course there are large sections of that movement from which, if you like, we take our mandate. In particular there are the very significant developments which have taken place within the Labour Party over the last few years. What we could call, in shorthand, the Bennite movement. That movement has thrown up the type of issues we are talking about. The importance Ken Livingstone and Tony Benn have given to Ireland is an example. Other issues which the Labour Party have, in the past, tended to steer clear of—the bias of state institutions like the police and the courts—have been raised by the Bennite movement. The same goes for racism and women's rights and even the sanctity of the mixed economy. So a struggle which began as one for greater democracy inside the Labour Party has been extended to the battle for democracy within society as a whole. Everyone involved in this struggle would probably agree there have been mistakes and shortcomings but nevertheless what has happened in the Labour Party in recent years is of tremendous historical importance, and anyone who thinks that this process is now at an end is very mistaken indeed. New developments and the continuing economic and social crisis within British society will continue to demand more urgent and more radical responses. So, to conclude, the fact that we are making films about these issues is not because a group called Platform Films sat down one day and decided what the working class needed; we see ourselves as no more than a voice for this wider movement we have talked about, although, yes, at times we maintain the right to give our own pitch to that voice.

A CELEBRATION OF CINEMA

THE LEICESTER INTERNATIONAL SUPER 8 FESTIVAL, REVIEWED BY ANDREW HIGSON

During the summer of '84, a week-long international festival of Super 8mm Film was held in Leicester, organised by the Leicester Independent Film and Video Association (LIFVA) in conjunction with Phoenix Arts.[1] It would be very easy to not review the festival: Super 8 has a low visibility and audibility within the film culture, just as 'provincial' events seem minimal from the point of view of the metropolis. All the more reason then to write about what was, for the many participants, an extremely successful event and a notable achievement on the part of the organisers. Spectators at the festival were able to witness the surprising and impressive range of film-making practices on Super 8, and also the surprising and impressive technical quality. Instead of regretting the absence of larger-gauge work, one could readily understand why so many film-makers are drawn to work in the medium. In the best possible terms, the festival was a veritable celebration of cinema.

The Leicester Independent Film and Video Association is a recently established workshop, one of many currently in operation in Britain, but perhaps unique in its commitment to Super

8. Its members see the festival, which they hope will be an annual event, as a natural, if ambitious, extension of their production and exhibition policy. Given the almost laughable amount of funding and sponsorship which they managed to attract[2], it is remarkable that they could organise such an extensive event: more than 60 hours of films from more than 120 film-makers and over ten countries were shown in three venues over a period of eight days. The festival could not have run on this scale without the mutually beneficial relationship which exists between them and the Phoenix Arts Centre through its Film Officer, Caroline Pick.

Organising an international festival from scratch is a daunting task, particularly in a field which, at least in terms of exhibition, is as under-explored as Super 8. Early on in the proceedings, organiser Laraine Porter decided that in the light of LIFVA's unfamiliarity with international production, and the lack of resources to travel to other festivals or screen everything in advance and return what they rejected, the programming should, for the first year at least, be non-selective and open to all film-makers, the sole criterion for entry being the need to have originated one's film on Super 8. It was a question of making the necessary contacts, both in Britain and overseas; a question of assessing the lie of the land, and finding out what was going on in the world of Super 8 film-making. Partly out of necessity, then, the event was eclectic and pluralist – which enabled festival-goers to consider the diversity of work in Super 8. Indeed, LIFVA made a conscious effort to achieve this diversity by the range of institutions, bodies and individuals which they contacted – so that, for instance, films from the workshop sector in Britain were shown

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[1] The festival was held between May 27 and June 2, 1984. LIFVA are based at Magazine Workspace, 11 Newarke Street, Leicester, England.

[2] Funding came from various sources including the Manpower Services Commission, the Arts Council of Great Britain, Leicester City Council, and the British Film Institute; in addition, there were various commercial sponsorships. The single full-time worker and three part-time workers at LIFVA were supplemented by the staff of Phoenix Arts, for evening screenings, and by numerous voluntary workers. Many of the overheads were covered by Phoenix Arts.

alongside films made by schoolchildren[3], the work of home movie enthusiasts and amateur film-makers of the local Cine-Society, as well as material received as a result of contacts with, among others, the International Federation of Super 8, and even a trade demonstration of the use of anamorphic lenses with Super 8, from the Widescreen Centre.

The programming itself was loosely categorised in order both to standardise the technical equipment required at each screening, and to aim as strongly as possible at particular audience groupings: for instance, an evening of films made by women, an evening of films made largely by gay men, and an evening of music films. (To judge by the numbers attending these screenings, the policy was very successful, and tied in well with the existing film programming policies of Phoenix Arts.) One of the festival's major successes was the quality of the projection, particularly during the evening screenings in Phoenix Arts' 270 seat auditorium. Using specially acquired Elmo GS 1200 projectors with Xenon arc lamps, and the house Dolby stereo system, and showing on a screen which at the best of times seems large these days in comparison to those of twinned commercial cinemas, the standard of image and sound reproduction was hardly to be faulted. This was even more evident in the case of some of the films which were of an extremely high technical standard, such as the package brought over from Paris by Yann Beauvais[4].

Similar screening facilities will have to be campaigned for at Regional Film Theatres and other independent screening venues around the country if the conditions for Super 8 film-makers are to improve. And certainly the scope of the work exhibited at the festival forced many to

acknowledge that such a campaign would be worthwhile. In this sense, the festival was extremely important in creating a high profile for the medium (it obviously has a much higher status elsewhere in the world) and particularly, for the first time in Britain, for bringing so many Super 8 film-makers together. The energy generated by the festival was evident from discussions held at the end of the week when, among other things, a formal network of film-makers working in Super 8 was established.[5] It was already felt that the festival brochure was itself an important source of information, containing, in addition to details of films screened, an international directory of film-makers and workshops and a number of trade adverts of use to those working in the medium.

In assessing the merits of the film-making witnessed at the festival it is important not to be drawn into the trap of a naive technological determinism: it is not simply that the medium of Super 8 consists in particular equipments which necessarily produce particular sorts of work. On the contrary, Super 8 must be considered in an institutional context – and from the range of material exhibited at the festival, it is evident that different groups of film-makers intersect with various institutional contexts and uses of film. In this sense, it is difficult to talk of a single, and specific Super 8 sensibility, unless one excludes much of the work shown at Leicester. At the same time the impetus of the festival, and of LIFVA and some of the other film-makers present, was towards establishing the parameters of an 'independent' Super 8 film culture. But even this was not argued through solely on the grounds of the technology available: above all else, it is funding which is *the* issue. This group of film-makers are probably closest to the ideologies and practices of the workshop movement within the independent film and video sector in Britain. But there are others who are institutionally framed in quite different ways – most clearly in the case of the Cine-Society movement, which seems to be caught in the wonderfully paradoxical situation of attempting to mimic Hollywood's narrative cinema, particularly its precision, its economy and its superficial flawlessness, while working with budgets and technologies ludicrously inferior to Hollywood. The result is the fetishisation of production values where their lack is a necessity, their achievement an impossibility, so that the

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[3] Among the school's screenings, it is worth noting in particular film-maker Chris Garratt's work with primary and secondary kids in the south west. The project 'A Year in Our Village' is written up in *Education Bulletin*, no 12, Spring 1984, published by the Arts Council, p 7.

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[4] Yann Beauvais runs Light Cone, an organisation which screens and distributes experimental films. The address is BP 7409, 7 5421 Paris, Cedex 09, France. See Michael Maziere and Gillian Swanson, 'Yann Beauvais Interviewed', *Undercut* no 12, Summer 1984, pp 30-33.

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[5] Anyone wishing to get in touch with this network should contact LIFVA at the address above.

'good' amateur film is the one which tells an 'entertaining' story in a technically 'proficient' manner. It is perhaps true to say that such film-makers use Super 8 almost entirely because they don't have access to the industrial cinema, as if its apparatus were a neutral technology and technique. This is by no means to deny the high technical standards of Cine-Society films shown at the festival. Interestingly, they were also almost the only conventional narrative films with lip synch sound that were shown there. (Most of them were rather terrifying sub-Hitchcock psychological thrillers – so much for cinema as family entertainment!)

Other films were caught up in institutional uses in which Super 8 technology figured as only one factor among many: film as a medium for reportage and journalistic documentary; film as an adjunct within contemporary alternative music culture; film as a material for the artist – the ideologies and practices of the institutions of fine art, of abstract and experimental film-making; and so on. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the claim for the cheapness and accessibility of Super 8, from which a number of implications develop. There is a strong ideological commitment to the ease and accessibility of the medium, an assumed democracy also marketed by the equipment manufacturers. For instance, design of cameras with built-in sound recording facilities is precisely directed towards ease of access at the 'popular' end of the market.[6]

Given this ideology of accessibility, one would expect that two of the major appropriations of Super 8 would be for two fairly distinct uses of film: documentary, where Super 8 would be defined in terms which revive the discourses of cinéma-vérité (lightweight, mobile equipment, direct sound, etc); and 'training', where Super 8 is used by fairly inexperienced film-makers to experiment with ideas and techniques at no great

expense (in some ways, both areas relate to the home movie or amateur use of the medium).

To some extent, these expectations were fulfilled by the festival. Much of the work shown was by young and inexperienced film-makers, many of them fine art students, or ex-students. Too often these films were made according to a fairly naive sensibility of sixth form humour, strongly influenced by the English eccentric tradition of Monty Python, etc, on the one hand, and the cheapness and accessibility of tomato ketchup on the other.

There were also a number of documentaries, reportage and agit-prop films, though probably less than one might have expected, given the prevalence of the ideology of accessibility. The 'documentary' most forcefully articulated in terms of this ideology was Isthmus Productions' technically tremendous footage for their *Nicaragua* film (as yet unfinished). Isthmus (who are based in Nottingham) made a strong argument for the benefits of light, portable and easily mobile equipment, which is cheap and therefore relatively accessible, and 'direct' in the sense that it is relatively unobtrusive and unintimidating to both those behind and those in front of the camera. They also pointed to the cheapness and availability of film stock, and the ease of transfer to videotape for editing and distribution/exhibition. The claim then was for Super 8 as a 'democratic' medium, without mystique and professional elitism, and where a high investment in sophisticated equipment is unnecessary. (At the same time they failed to explain why they didn't then use video exclusively.)

The other most impressive and sustained use of Super 8 in the documentary/reportage/agit-prop field was a series of films by Gwyn Kirk, shown on the women's night, which were made for various campaigns, such as the women's peace camp at Greenham Common. Here one saw a very different point of view to that of the dominant institutions of television news and current affairs.

In general terms, there was very little conventional narrative cinema at the festival, besides the films from the Cine-Societies, and another technically impressive package of films from Quebec.[7] The relative lack of continuity-edited narratives is perhaps partly due to the difficulty of recording and editing synch sound cheaply and easily on Super 8, and partly,

[6] Nicky Hamlyn considers Super 8 film-making in similar terms to those developed above in a useful article 'Recent English Super 8 at B2 Gallery', in *Undercut* nos 10-11, Winter 1983, pp 51-54.

[7] In Quebec, Super 8 is not considered an art form because of its home movie connotations; as a result, it is funded through the Ministry of Leisure, Hunting and Fishing, which funds all hobbies from macramé to football. Even so, L'Association Pour Le Jeune Cinéma Québecoise receive £30,000 per annum!

52 perhaps, to the fact that initially it is easier to break the rules of continuity editing than to perfect them as a technique. Certainly, there were a great many psychodramas and dream films which relied upon disjunctive jump cuts, ellipses, and bizarre shifts in point of view and mise-en-scène, as well as other optical devices such as re-filming, slow-speed filming, superimposition and video mixing. Perhaps the strongest group of films in this category were from the cultish circle associated with the London-based Dark Pictures (Michael Kostiff, John Maybury, Steve Chivers, Derek Jarman *et al*). These resolutely symbolist film-makers constitute the 'New Romanticism' of contemporary cinema, teasing out images of delirious sexuality and mysticism in a visually and aurally excessive style.

The conspicuous lack of tightly scripted dialogue and acting suggested that at last Super 8 has liberated cinema from synch sound – making a virtue of what seems, in comparison with other formats, a distinct limitation: the medium's relative difficulties of editing with sound. This is not to deny that most of the films at the festival used sound, and in particular, music; but there did seem to be much less work being done on the soundtrack than on the image track. Too often, music was rendered once more simply a mood-inducing accompaniment (and indeed the widespread practice of using 'found music' raises horrendous problems of copyright). Too often, the choice of music was predictable and clichéd: a lot of 'weird', 'spooky', 'spacey' music to go with many of the psychodramas, which was all too obvious in its mystical production of enigmas. Indeed too many of these films lapsed into an unproductive mysticism or nihilistic anarchism and eccentrism: lots of exotic and mysterious question marks, and not many avenues offered out of the labyrinths. No doubt much of this is the process of students reacting against the rigorous, de-psychologised work of their structural-materialist teachers – and perhaps drifting into introspection and narcissism in the depressed 1980s.

It now seems possible to add a further stage to the 'surrealist' trajectory established by P Adams Sitney and others[8]: from the dadaist and surrealist films of the '20s and '30s in Europe, through Maya Deren in the States in the '40s, and the American underground of the late '50s and '60s (particularly those films associated with Kenneth Anger and Jack Smith), to the Super 8 film-makers – or at least a number of those working in Britain and France today. It should also be noted of course that Jeff Keen, often associated with surrealism, also works in 8mm gauge, and, indeed, showed some double and triple screen versions of his 'home movies' at the Festival (only he had the gall to bring his home movies!)

While few of the works shown could really be called surrealist films, several possessed a surreal sensibility or adopted some of the devices and conventions of the dream film. Some of Dark Pictures' and LIFVA's work achieves a dream-like intensification of imagery through the processing of the film (e.g. by blowing Super 8 up to 16, by re-filming, and so on) achieving a pulsating, grainy quality. Referring back to the '20s and the '60s, other films drew on the popular and the kitsch as a resource, with a particular fascination for Hollywood and popular television. The most productive tendency here was in the many re-readings and de-constructions/ re-constructions of found footage. At times, this consisted in a surreal and fetishistic obsession with particular figures, gestures and moments (as in Jo Comino's *Whoopee!*, a re-working of Eddie Cantor performing 'Making Whoopee'). At other times, there was a much more conscious effort to challenge the dominant ideologies of these popular media – as in Steve Binnion's gay re-reading of a series of looks exchanged between the sailors in the Hollywood musical *South Pacific (Sounds Specific)*. Many such films arrested the flow of television (or popular film), constructing new and unexpected relationships, connections and disconnections. As in the best surrealist films, a powerful ambiguity was developed, as meaning became transient and unfixed.

Some of these devices were used to other ends, as in Laraine Porter's beautifully shot and edited *Happyland*, a film about memories of childhood visits to the seaside, which manages at the same time to be nostalgic and loosely investigative of that nostalgia. Other films used the same devices towards a much less investigative camp sensibility: a decadent narcissism and fragmentation which again seems very much of

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[8] See P Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film*, Oxford University Press, 1979.

Laraine Porter's *Happyland*: both nostalgic and investigative of that nostalgia.

the culture of the depressed 1980s. To be sure, the latter were not setting out to be in any way analytical, but it was perhaps this area of film-making which seemed weakest at the festival: there was little evidence among the British film-makers of the kind of avant-garde cinema which works on the analysis and deconstruction of non-specifically cinematic codes – films which play on the boundaries of history, story, discourse and performance. A notable exception was Paul Buck's carefully crafted *Crowd Scenes*. This two-hour film examined patterns of voyeurism and male spectatorship as well as playing extensively with disjunctions between a minimal image and a soundtrack which betrayed a real commitment to to language. The films of Bob Pegg also raised

ideas about the representation of landscape and character in cinema, but unfortunately lacked the technical quality to carry them through. It was necessary to look to New York's punk Super 8 movement for further evidence of this sort of film-making: Eric Mitchell's *Red Italy*, Beth and Scott B's *Letters to Dad* and the films of the Irish film-maker Vivienne Dick were all highly polished and provocative.

If most Super 8 film-making in Britain is not bound up in the ideologies and practices of the independent film and video movement of the '70s and '80s, how then is it validated? Much of it seems to grow less from theoretical work (often the starting point for the independent movement) than from the less rigorously theorised problems
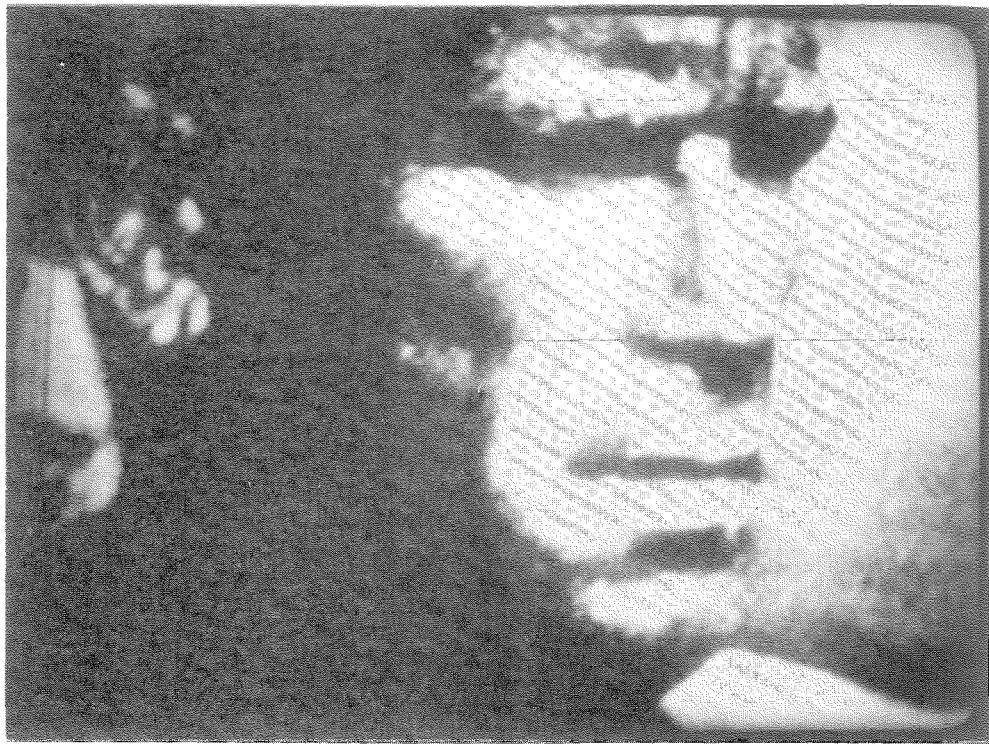
Steve Binnion's *Sounds Specific*: a gay re-reading of *South Pacific*.

and fascinations of the various cultural groupings which use it – and in particular, the fascinations with specific forms of musical and visual style generated at the intersections between post-punk and new romantic youth cultures and the culture of the art college. It should be remembered that it was on Super 8 that Don Letts (whose *Punk Rock Movie* was shown at the last night of the festival) and others filmed much of the early explosion of punk. And today, one of the major areas of Super 8 work is in the production of films to back live bands (for example Mick Duffield's work with Crass, and Double Vision with Cabaret Voltaire and others).

It is perhaps easy to dismiss this sector of Super 8 work as anarchic and unthought-out, lacking that 'social purpose' that has had such a prominence within British film culture since the 1930s documentary movement. On the other hand, it is important to salute its sense of playfulness, fluidity and humour, which constitutes something of a challenge to the constipation of contemporary British independent cinema. To some extent, this anarchic quality is the product of the medium as a technology – or, to be more precise, of the ideology of accessibility which valorises the medium. Super 8 film-makers often talk of the spontaneous, *throwaway* quality of the medium, the DIY aesthetic: the process of making films seems more open-ended, and (given the relative ease with which material can be re-worked and re-edited) unfinished. Unusually, process almost shares an equal role with product. As one film-maker somewhat anxiously put it, 'with Super 8, you get the feeling that you've never quite finished the film.'

There is a strong belief that working in Super 8 allows the film-maker to be relatively intransigent and uncompromising: to take risks that might not be feasible in other formats (but video . . . ?). On the other hand, given the relative inexperience of some of the film-makers, there was a tendency to opt for the easiest clichés of aural and visual pleasure. Either way, it was certainly the case that, given the ideology of accessibility, many of the British film-makers at least were prepared to show technically 'rough' work that they might not get away with on 16mm.

Another quality attributed to the medium by several of the film-makers – and foregrounded in

their films – is its intimacy. Once again, the claim has numerous implications and effects, almost all of them positively valued. Clearly, this intimacy was important to a number of women film-makers, who felt that Super 8 was intimidating to neither film-makers nor actors, and who produced films which made highly personal statements (as in the case of two films made in the form of a letter: Liz Soden's *Roundabout* and Laura Hastings-Smith's *Dear Jill*). It would perhaps be fair to say then that the political energies of several of the Super 8 film-makers exhibiting at the festival are directed towards the politics of the personal (it is worth noting the number of women and gay men working in the medium).

The other way in which the medium becomes intimate is in the self-conscious use of Super 8 as *caméra-stylo*. Dependent once more on its 'accessibility', the camera becomes a pen for jotting down or trying out ideas in a notebook, a sketch book, a diary (a sort of professionalisation of the home movie ideology). This enables the film-maker to become closer to other cultural producers such as writers, painters and photographers, who have always been able to maintain this form of practice, recording and investigating ideas quickly and cheaply. This method of working, combined with the cheapness of stock, etc, means that Super 8 can become an important alternative to the more spasmodic, production grant approach of other independent film sectors: a valuable means of achieving continuity of production.

A number of films in the genre of the personal (or lyrical) documentary effectively straddle these two categories of intimacy: films such as *Happyland* (discussed earlier); the intriguing *Ciné-Senegal*, by Kathryn Hrechdakian (from the USA), a sort of diary film following in a highly poetic way the cinéma-vérité film-maker Ricky Leacock at work in Senegal; several of the films brought over as a package from Modern Films of Hong Kong; and one or two of Michael Kostiff's films, such as *China Seas*.

Most of the films so far discussed depend upon a strong pro-filmic event (Nicky Hamlyn suggests this is true of much contemporary Super 8 film work[9]), but the festival also exhibited a number of abstract films – although even several of these depended upon the processing of concrete pro-filmic events such that they become abstract, or at least enigmatic and

ambiguous (as in the case of Derek Jarman's *In the Shadow of the Sun* and *TG's Psychic Rally in Heaven*). There was also a rare package of expanded cinema, performed by Guy Sherwin and Tony Hill, who, like Jeff Keen, seemed like veterans among so many younger film-makers. Their films humorously explored the permutations of projection and the imaginative geography of the screening space: film as performance challenging the status of the illusionist image.

The unexpected diversity of the material shown at the festival, so much of it made on a shoestring budget, is, if nothing else, indicative of the vitality and energy of film-making today in this country and elsewhere. It may also indicate the medium's relative lack of institutionalisation over its twenty-year history. Traditionally, the strongest hold has been by the amateur film-makers (and equipment manufacturers), the home movie enthusiasts. However, their hold is already weak given their low status within the film culture, and this, coupled with the absence of much recorded history of Super 8, means that there is no strongly defined tradition of rules and infrastructures[10] to resist or challenge, leaving the way open to the establishment of an independent Super 8 film culture. Further, it is likely that the already weak hold of amateur film-makers on Super 8 will diminish as they inevitably drift towards video. But this is itself not without its problems for those who continue to work in the medium, as they will have to put strong pressure on the equipment manufacturers to continue to service their needs.

Throughout this review, the term 'independence' has been used rather loosely, and it is perhaps worth making a few comments about it in relation to Super 8 film-making. The festival brochure states that 'Super 8 films can be made by people working without State or commercial aid, bringing them closer to real aesthetic and political independence.' Further, several of the film-makers present were ready to claim that, given the lack of funding and the relative cheapness of the medium, Super 8 was

[9] Nicky Hamlyn, op cit, p 52.

[10] There are much stronger and better funded infrastructures for Super 8 in, for instance, Paris, Quebec and West Germany. By comparison, there is a marked poverty of good post-production facilities in Britain.

the only *real* independent cinema left, especially given the 'professionalisation' and self-protection of the 16mm independent sector with the advent of the Workshop Agreement and Channel Four. But the term 'independence' has always had something of a rhetorical and polemical flavour, and in this instance, it is difficult to draw a clear line between 'independence' and 'marginalisation' or 'ghettoisation'. Certainly, Super 8 is relatively easy to break into, since the codes and conventions of industrial cinema have little hold here, and certainly one can appreciate the political argument for the medium's cheapness. But at the same time, Super 8 film production is very small scale, under-funded and artisanal and will remain so, so long as larger sums are not available (significantly, few of the Regional Arts Associations will fund Super 8). One problem here is that, as indicated, few Super 8 films are made from a detailed shooting script, and yet most of the funding bodies allocate money only on the basis of such a script. Conversely, it will be difficult to balance demands for better funding with claims for accessibility and the DIY aesthetic.

What is unequivocal about the assertion of independence is the challenge to those users of Super 8 who merely attempt to imitate work produced in other formats, and in particular work produced in Hollywood. From this challenging point of view, Super 8 is neither a marginal technology, nor a poor cousin of 16 or 35mm: 'independent' Super 8 work might then be defined as that which develops working practices appropriate to the medium, or working practices which explore the possibilities and push at the limits of the technology, and which at the same time challenge the ideological conventions of commercial cinema.

The festival allowed many of these issues to be raised, in addition to providing a week's intensive viewing of some very exciting film-making. One hopes that LIFVA will be able at least to attract the necessary funds and resources to run the festival again next year on the same, or a larger, scale; and also that it will be able to capitalise on the energy generated among the Super 8 film-making community by the festival, and help to establish the medium as a better funded and more widely acknowledged sector at all levels of production, distribution and exhibition.

12

UNDERCUT

the magazine from 'the London Filmmakers' Coop

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Subscription rates for 4 issues
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THE FRONT LINE AND THE REAR GUARD

LISA CARTWRIGHT DISSECTS
A NEW STUDY OF THE
AVANT-GARDE

[1] Christine Delphy,
Close to Home,
London, Hutchinson,
1984, p 147.

[2] Jonathan Rosenbaum,
*Film: the Front Line
1983*, Denver, Arden
Press, 1983, p 175.

[3] ibid.

[4] Christine Delphy, 'For
a Materialist
Feminism', *Feminist
Issues*, Winter, 1981, p
72.

Academia is not a neutral location and the revolution is not, to my knowledge, over. [1]

Of course the rules for 'good moviemaking' mean something; they are valid for plenty of reasons, and to say that one sometimes gets weary of them after years of submitting to their dictates as a dutiful viewer is not to argue that they should be dismissed a priori. What needs to be discovered in greater depth is the kind of complex pleasures that can be had on occasion by moving beyond the boundaries of these standards. [2]

'OF COURSE the rules for "good moviemaking" mean *something*'; they mean, and they mean for, the reproduction of sexual division for male power at every level of the process of making 'good' and other kinds of movies. It is precisely this 'something' that the rules for good moviemaking mean – it is precisely the meaning of (the rules for) good moviemaking – that is the underlying and unstated main point of Jonathan Rosenbaum's *Film: The Front Line 1983* [3]. It is precisely this 'something' and its imprecise status as just that and nothing more *against* which avant-garde film must work in order to be revolutionary, in order to be avant-garde.

'The premises of all social sciences, to the extent that they do not posit men/women relationships as relationships of dominance, posit them, by act or omission, as something else'. [4] Avant-garde film, like dominant cinema or any other social practice, functions to position – reposition – 'people' in this primary relationship of sexual division for male dominance. Whether by *act*, through blatant representations of men and women, or by *omission* (also an act, through which 'more complex', less immediately discernible, positions are nevertheless just as firmly reasserted, for instance, through identification with camera position in non-narrative films void of representations of people *per se*), 'good' dominant and avant-garde movies reproduce this relationship which is basic to meaning itself, to establishing *a* reality as *the* reality.

If only one *could* dismiss, *a priori*, the rules for dominant cinema. One does find oneself weary of them when at every moment one finds oneself *within* these rules (whether one dutifully submits or doesn't) whether this is before, within or 'beyond the boundaries' of these rules (whether

beyond or before be at avant-garde film or elsewhere). Unfortunately for some – for those of us for whom the rules are *not* – the rules for dominant cinema are too dominant simply to dismiss just now, much less *a priori* or beyond. The existence of these rules, the fact of their meaning and the reality they embody is the main point and therefore the starting point for revolutionary process in any field. In offering a position before or beyond but not within these rules, *Film: The Front Line 1983* offensively obscures the 'inevitable fact' of what exists within the rules of dominant cinema. This cover-up is the first step to maintaining those rules *as* inevitable, *as* fact.

What needs to be discovered in greater depth is how the rules for dominant cinema are cunningly protected and developed ('more complexly') within avant-garde cinema. What needs to be asked is what and how the rules for dominant cinema mean in dominant and avant-garde cinema, and for whom they mean 'something' and why it is in their interest to protect that 'something' *as* a vague 'something'. Most importantly, it must be asked whether the avant-garde is at all avant-garde, and, if not, it must be asked 'what is avant-garde?'

It is a theory of the answers to these questions which is avant-garde in the avant-garde film academy. Such a theory will derive from the juncture of *feminism*, which starts from the oppression of women and therefore radically throws into question sexual division, and *materialism*, which, in any field, challenges the most basic premises: not only the interpretation of the object is of concern, but also the look which perceived the object, and the object that it constituted, right down to the most apparently 'technical' and 'neutral' concepts.[5] This juncture results in a practice that is *experimental* in that its radical questioning at every level – questioning the very constitution of film as such – results in an approach which remains wholly to be defined.

Though Rosenbaum's book is the first in a series designed 'to generate a critical dialogue that will bring the political and aesthetic issues of the avant-garde into focus'[6], these questions – the theory which begins to address the main point of cinema, the theory which is avant-garde in the avant-garde film academy – are left unmentioned until page 228. In conversation with Peter Gidal, Rosenbaum asks, 'how does feminism figure into these (feminist, antinarrative, experimental) films?' On page 229 the book ends.

What is Rosenbaum's theory of the avant-garde?

It will be observed that the rules and criteria governing many of the decisions in this book are not so much fixed as fluid and shifting.[7]

... a woman's writing ... has no place for 'the concept as such', is ... 'fluid' in style ....[8]

Fluid and shifting rules and criteria for writing have certain fixed historical/theoretical contexts. One such context is French neo-feminist theory. Its incorporation into avant-garde film theory is not new, and it cannot be by chance that Rosenbaum uses its terminology to describe

[5] ibid, p 73.

[6] Jonathan Rosenbaum, op cit, publisher's note.

[7] ibid, p 29.

[8] Stephen Heath citing Luce Irigaray in 'Difference', *Screen* Autumn 1978, vol 19 no 3, p 79.

9 See, for example, Monique Plaza, 'Phallomorphic Power and the Psychology of "Woman"', *Ideology and Consciousness* no 4, Autumn 1978.

10 Stephen Heath citing Viviane Forrester in op cit, pp 79-80.

11 Jonathan Rosenbaum, op cit, p 209.

12 ibid.

his own rules and criteria.

The ways in which this neo-feminism reconstitutes the same place for 'woman' offered to women by patriarchy, and is therefore not feminist but anti-feminist, have been criticised in articles little known to English readers.[9] The very anti-feminism of this 'feminism' – it has no theory or, rather, has a fluid and shifting theory which covers everything and nothing with no basis in oppression, no basis in the oppression of women which is *the* basis of feminist theory – is precisely the source of its appeal.

...forgetting of the hierarchical orders, the categories.... Forgetting, it is exactly in that that any writer, man or woman, must become woman in order to operate.[10]

The popularity of this position often rests on the ease with which it allows itself to be lifted from its historical context and applied *ad hoc*. Without a theory of oppression, it lends itself to anyone wishing to 'forget' his or her own particular position within existing hierarchies, and the rules and criteria which maintain that order. The results are devastating for those in less privileged positions: the benefits are great for those already in power, who can confound any effort for change by 'forgetting' their position whenever convenient.

The book – its author – shifts from film-maker to film-maker, with eighteen chapter headings from Akerman to Thornton, and deals briefly with 22 more in an appendix. This, with eight brief interjections (all titled 'the argument thus far'), is sandwiched between two conversations (between the author and Jonas Mekas on the USA avant-garde, and Gidal on the British avant-garde, respectively). The eighteen-plus-one chapters which constitute the bulk of the book cover film-makers working out of at least half-a-dozen different countries, from at least two generations, representing a range of political positions. In his first 'argument thus far', Rosenbaum criticises the *New Yorker* and the New York Film Festival for insidiously fostering an 'illusion of inclusiveness in order to mask its own principles of exclusion and oversimplification'[11]. In failing to establish the main point of his own choices, and *moreover*, in presenting those choices side by side through happenstance of alphabetisation without addressing the irreconcilable oppositions present therein, Rosenbaum fosters just such an illusion of inclusiveness, masking his own particular principles of exclusion/inclusion.

All sorts of determinations have led to the choices of the individual subjects of the 18 previous sections – some of which are rational and thus can be rationalized, some of which are irrational and thus can't be. To say that I could have just as easily picked 18 other filmmakers would be accurate only if I had equal access to the films of every candidate.[12]

This statement fluidly dodges the question of what *is* in the book by shifting from Rosenbaum's choices to his imagined *handicaps*. 1) Certain choices are irrational and are therefore conveniently beyond his res-

ponsibility, and beyond discussion or criticism. 2) He is *denied* access to
certain films, therefore he can only write about the eighteen plus he has
chosen (an utterly irrational excuse, as he has certainly seen hundreds of
other films in his career).

Without a stated theoretical framework, how can one begin to deal
with the radically divergent practices presented side by side? Is one to
assume a massive international film avant-garde with New York City as
its capital, an ideological 'melting pot' out of which Rosenbaum speaks?
Even in New York, the work of Mekas and Ottinger, for instance,
brought together alphabetically, would be considered in terms of the
glaring differences in that conjuncture. These differences are not self-
evident! Such random orderings allow the 'fact' that Mark Rappaport
'has the misfortune of living in the wrong century and on the wrong con-
tinent'[13] to have as much import as the particular position Rappaport
occupies within *this* century, *this* continent (North America), *this* film
avant-garde.

And what avant-garde is that? Jonas Mekas' claim that 'the field is too
big. No one can cover it all'[14] might prompt one to wonder not only why
Rosenbaum might want to cover 'it all' but what 'it all' is – of what field
does Mekas speak, does Rosenbaum write? Odd that the film avant-
garde, by definition a politically revolutionary forefront, should be
swelled to unspeakable proportions ('literally thousands' compared to
the 'twenty or thirty'[15] film-makers working, presumably, in the USA in
the sixties). Odd that this could happen now in the USA in the eighties
where the material conditions militating *against* any revolutionary
movement's growth are greater than ever. The growing mass of so-called
avant-garde film-makers certainly cannot be linked to any revolutionary
development in the field – if anything, one might argue that the field is
burgeoning precisely because the work being produced is not revolution-
ary! Yet *Film: The Front Line 1983* borrows its very title from (militant)
revolutionary language.

If the Rosenbaum front line is not revolutionary, it is inconceivable
that this so-called avant-garde could bring revolution about. When
Lenin said 'no revolutionary organization has ever practiced, or could
practice, broad democracy, however much it may have desired to do
so'[16], he wasn't trying to prevent spontaneous revolution. Just as a broad-
based revolutionary organisation was an impossibility at that point, so it
is, *in any field*, here in the USA in 1984. So what *is* this mass avant-
garde, if not avant-garde? What is the field? A mass independent/
alternative cinema functioning in and for the rules of dominant cinema
(the dominant rules of male privilege, including the impossible
American free enterprise system *which derives from those rules*) is the
field, and it isn't in favour of any kind of revolutionary struggle.

In forgetting the particular, often opposing, positions from which
avant-garde films are made, Rosenbaum tries to deal with *it all* – he tries
to cover everything; in forgetting the particular position within the exist-
ing hierarchy from which he writes, Rosenbaum claims to have a fluid
and shifting position – he says nothing in particular. In putting forth

[13] ibid, p 149.

[14] ibid, p 12.

[15] ibid.

[16] VI Lenin, *What Is To
Be Done?*, New York,
International
Publishers, 1929, p
136.

[17] Jonathan Rosenbaum, op cit, p 14.

[18] Cable television is independent, non-commercial, privately or subscriber funded, and is composed of a multitude of stations, often with short-range broadcast, each focusing on a specific audience issue or form. MTV is a joint investment of Warner Communications and American Express, has 12,000,000 subscribers, and is broadcast nationally. The station transmits rock music 'promos' — videotapes promoting upcoming or established bands. Its prime target is the family, especially those members with a 'three minute attention span' (MTV spokesman Roy Traykin). These tapes are, of course, nothing more than continual advertisement — for the bands and the blatant sexism and racism which they display. See Annie Goldson, 'Three-Minute Heroes', *Heresies* 'Film/Video/Media' issue no 16.

[19] Jonathan Rosenbaum, op cit, p 40.

[20] ibid, p 214.

something of everything or (and this is after all the same thing) nothing in particular, Rosenbaum firmly reasserts his neither fluid nor shifting position in support of the dominant rules and criteria, whether this position finds its basis in French *écriture* feminism or another theory: the one he shares with the *New Yorker* and the New York Film Festival — American democratic pluralism.

One thing I want to do in my book is include certain films that, in one sense, are avant-garde precisely because they are overlooked and ignored.[17]

Precisely. By fluid and shifting criteria, every one *can* make it in and into the revolutionary set; in the USA film front line one should be a star precisely if and because one is not. In this liberal spirit, the work of Beth B and Scott B, showcased at the 1983 New York Film Festival and on the phenomenally successful cable television station, Music Television (MTV)[18] is awarded a chapter in Rosenbaum's book. Since the work is certainly not overlooked and ignored, to what does Rosenbaum attribute its inclusion? To 'belonging to the political (and leftist) branch of punk filmmaking'[19]? 'Political (and leftist)' is beyond any reading of these films — unless one could call stylistic allusions to (leftist) politics (a character named Max Carl — catch the drift?) leftist. Is this what Rosenbaum means by avant-garde? In order to call these films political (and leftist) or avant-garde, one would have to elide any mention of the blatantly re-produced relationships of dominance and submission, the continual portrayal of characters acting out the most standard of men/women stereotypes, however ironically, innocuously or ridiculously presented through role reversal, stereotyping, etc. Politically left-conscious representations of men/women relationships are the same as politically right-conscious, or 'indifferently' political, dominant cinema productions. Even for an audience in the know. The one difference is that the left-conscious reproduction of relationships of sexual division, insidiously devolved, passed off, 'transcended' and/or celebrated as radical left ideology, is the ultimate inversion of left *and* feminist politics; it is the ultimate in reactionary art — it is pro-capitalist, patriarchal, left-conscious art. It is an aesthetic of politics, a pure aesthetic of leftism which negates the political use of leftism for the left, and turns it into an anti-feminist tool for the right. This is annihilation in every sense, and not just fascistic. In the sense that it seeks to annihilate feminism, it is *post*-fascistic.

Having achieved both the inclusion of work which is (*not*) overlooked and ignored, and the political (and reactionary) act of labelling political (and reactionary) work 'political (and leftist)', it is perfectly conceivable that work which is overlooked and ignored and is politically radical should *continue* to be overlooked and ignored. It is perfectly conceivable that, for instance, *Retour d'un repère composé* (Rose Lowder, 1981, France), 'the most rigorous film of its kind'[20] to Rosenbaum's knowledge, is mentioned briefly in the '22 More Filmmakers' chapter, and again briefly in conversation with Gidal at the end of the book. As 'the most rigorous film of its kind', one would think it merits more discussion
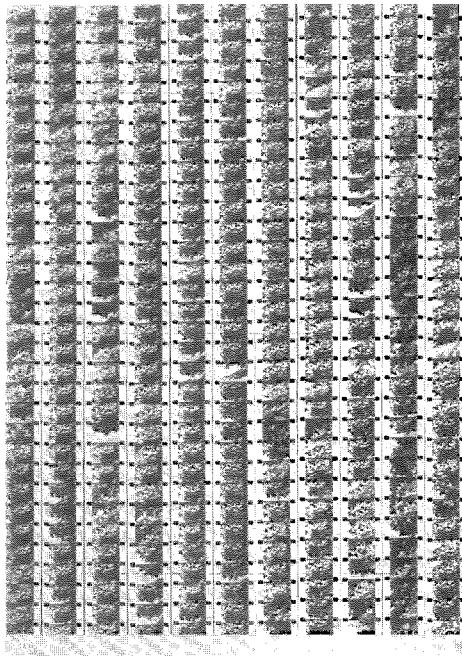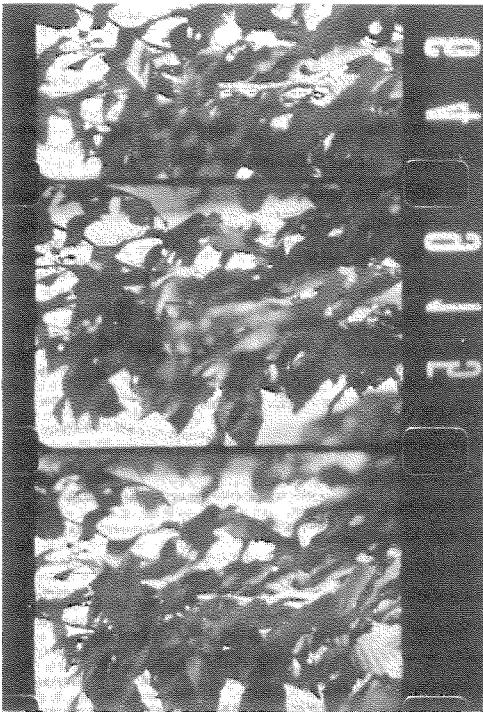
Left, detail from footage of *Retour d'un repère
composé* (above).

than that in a book on avant-garde film. Given the underlying point of
the book, however, it would seem that it is precisely *because* of its rigour
that it is mentioned so briefly.

What kind of film is it? It is an avant-garde, experimental, and mater-
ialist feminist film. It is rigorous in that it works in a total way against the
repositioning of meaning, with its basis in sexual division, at every level.
Retour d'un repère composé works against the meaning of 'good' movie-
making at the level of the most 'neutral' concept of representation, and
the most 'technical' concepts of film production – levels which are
usually 'forgotten'. What this 'forgetting' means for avant-garde film is
that it provides a point – the main point – at which relations of sexual
division can be re-established, unnoticed. *Retour d'un repère composé*
proceeds from the most banal rules for 'good' movie-making by challeng-
ing the 'logical' connection between an image and the object which that
image represents. The initial recognition (of image *of* leaves *as* leaves) is
not assumed, but is shown as an impossible assumption. Representation
is revealed as a process which can *not* work, cannot reproduce the real.
This fundamental material impossibility is possible only within the
given logic, the logic based on sexual division. It is this 'logic' which is
the logic of 'good' movie-making. Such terms and processes at once pro-
vide the basis for the real and are materially impossible. It is materially
impossible, for instance, that men/women relationships *could* be repro-
duced through images; notwithstanding, it is inevitably the primary task

of 'good' movies to do just that – to extend the idealist, dominant ideology of sexual division as reality itself, by creating a 'logical' framework based on a material impossibility. This idealism is the methodology of male dominance, it is how it reproduces itself.

It is incompatible with the fundamental idealism of the logic of 'good' movie-making to allow for a materialist feminist method as a material possibility. Doing this would cause a revolution in knowledge which might reveal the material impossibility of the tenets of this logic! This is exactly why, in every field, it is materialist feminist work which is *not* acknowledged, not dealt with in depth, is ignored and cannot proceed to extend its analysis, its work. Hence *Retour d'un repère composé*'s status as 'the most rigorous film of its kind' *and* as ignored.

Rosenbaum writes that he is 'still waiting for a critique of Brakhage that begins to deal critically with the familial, patriarchal and phallocratic side of his work and the reactionary stance that inevitably derives from it'.[21] Having stated this, he launches directly into a critique of Annette Michelson, problematically representative patron of the familial, patriarchal and phallocratic, for having 'discharged *her duty to the Left* in one well-considered sentence'.[22] While this sentence certainly, does discharge *Brakhage* of any possible duty to the left, one might wonder on what Rosenbaum bases his knowledge of *Michelson's* ever having had such a 'duty to the Left'. He mentions 'a European Marxist sensibility which she must surely have shared at some point'.[23] Such 'Marxist sensibility', however, with no basis in any revolutionary objective, is easily used for 'other' objectives which most often go unstated. Such 'sensibility' is what the deradicalisation and coopting of revolutionary method into the academic realm is all about – a point which Rosenbaum recognises in Michelson's work (if not in his own): 'Michelson capitulates to a position that simplifies many subsequent academic careers and institutional postures (her own included) by accepting "apoliticism" as a way of life, even within the pages of a magazine that strategically calls itself *October* . . . '.[24]

But of what relevance is (a critique of) Michelson's duty (or lack thereof) to the left, or to the right, for that matter, in relation to the critique for which Rosenbaum waits – the one that begins to deal with the familial, patriarchal and phallocentric side of Brakhage? In discharging – or never taking on – 'her duty to the Left' in relation to Brakhage or anyone else, Michelson remains neither here nor there as regards the patriarchal, etc. Before the critique of *that* can begin even to be formulated, it must be acknowledged that the familial, patriarchal and phallocratic 'side' (of Brakhage's work or anyone else's) is not a side at all but is a base, the base, for (Brakhage's or anyone else's) work. In leaving this main point unstated, the avant-garde film academy will wait forever for the familial, patriarchal and phallocratic critique of Brakhage – and waiting forever is precisely the point of formulations which leave this unstated, or which euphemistically label it *a* side. Waiting forever is precisely the point of indicting Michelson not for not initiating the awaited critique *of* the patriarchal 'side', but for not dutifully maintaining a leftist critique *within* it.

21 ibid, p 47.

22 ibid, p 48. (The sentence in question runs: 'It is a tragedy of our time (that tragedy is not, by any means, exclusively, but rather, like so much else, *hyperbolically* American) that Brakhage should see his social function as defensive in the Self's last-ditch stand against the mass, against the claims of any possible class, political process, or structure, assuming its inevitable assault upon the sovereignty of the Self, positing the imaginative consciousness as inherently apolitical.' Annette Michelson, 'Camera Lucida/ Camera Obscura', *Artforum*, January 1973.)

23 ibid, p 48.

24 ibid.

So who can blame Michelson for not capitulating to the left? Within the film avant-garde one derives one's position (with concomitant privileges and restrictions) through associations with men (e.g., Michelson is not 'on the left' but is seen to perform 'her duty *to* the Left'). When working *as a woman* within a system which does not acknowledge sex-class division, much less acknowledge that division as basic to the system, why not opt for the right, where the greater power and privileges lie? But the question of Michelson's particular position as a woman in relation to either pro- or anti-capitalist patriarchy, though key to the critique Rosenbaum waits for, never enters his book. Thanks to this oversight, one can easily picture Rosenbaum among the oppressed of Brakhage's patriarchy, which is really Annette Michelson's patriarchy, according to Rosenbaum. And it is Annette Michelson who is responsible for the suppression of the critique of patriarchy which he, Rosenbaum, waits for! What better way for members of the oppressor class to maintain their interests than to identify the oppressed as the enemy?

Further, if one were genuinely interested in either a leftist or a feminist critique, why not pinpoint another representative member of Brakhage's rightist patriarchy, his 'principal critic' according to Rosenbaum[25], P Adams Sitney. If Brakhage has become 'a meaty carcass capable of feeding generations of students to come'[26] in Michelson's realm of anti-revolutionary academia, Michelson is, for Rosenbaum, just such an object for critical consumption, diverting potential picking-on from more suitable targets such as Sitney. The latter's name is barely (once) mentioned in Rosenbaum's critique of Michelson, except parenthetically and obliquely[27] – in reference not to Sitney's position *vis-à-vis* Brakhage, the left, or even patriarchy, but in a snide reference to Marjorie Keller's film *The Fallen World* (1983,USA), in which Sitney performs.

Finally, if one awaited in anything other than dread a critique of Brakhage that begins to address the patriarchal, why mention *The Fallen World*, an homage to the Brakhage apolitical romantic tradition, only in parenthesis? Keller is one of the few women film-makers in the US making non-narrative films, and is one of still fewer women whose non-narrative films have been claimed to be feminist – a claim not supported by Keller herself and challenged by many feminist theorists. A discussion of Keller's work in a book such as Rosenbaum's might address the questions of the awaited critique, might address Rosenbaum's own question: 'How does feminism figure in these (*anti*-narrative, feminist, experimental) films?'[28] But, of course, the answer to – the answering of – this question is not in Rosenbaum's interest.

For Jonathan Rosenbaum, this is what the avant-garde is for –
The films of Michael Snow provide one thing:

The apparent 'absence' of what one usually goes to the movies for gets replaced by its dynamic equivalent, but this time taking root equally in the seeing mind and in the seeing camera, the 'content' of the film springing out of the quasi-sexual partnership of these two parents, camera and body/mind defining one another endlessly in ecstatic, reciprocal acts of recognition.[29]

[25] ibid, p 49.

[26] ibid, p 48.

[27] ibid.

[28] ibid, p 228.

[29] ibid, p 176.

[30] ibid, p 153.

[31] ibid, p 126.

[32] ibid.

[33] ibid, p 124.

[34] Serge Daney, from a
1982 article in
Libération, France,
quoted in ibid, p 196.

[35] P Adams Sitney,
Visionary Film, New
York, Oxford
University Press,
1974.

The films of Jackie Raynal provide another, same, thing:

*Solipsistic, masturbatory games, to be sure. But isn't the camera a solipsistic instrument and movie-going largely a masturbatory activity – regardless of their manifold alibis and excuses (which is what most film criticism is about)? **Deux Fois** is perhaps an avant-garde film first of all because it allows itself no shame whatsoever for reveling in the pleasures to be found in those simple facts.* [30]

Of course! Cinema as solipsistic and masturbatory is only natural, a 'simple fact'! What better primary criterion for avant-garde film than 'film which revels in that fact'. And what better excuse for critical investment than to establish this 'fact' as fact. (Is this not what this book is about?) But this time these 'facts' of avant-garde film are established with more complex, dynamic equivalents. These equivalents of dominant cinema are found all along Rosenbaum's alphabetical list:

A) In the 'quasi-sexual partnership' of the father of North American structural film and his camera (ecstatically) defining one another, fixing 'us' in a space where we don't need narrative for identification to take place (*this time* with the camera) or for an Oedipal structure to be found (if one wants to).

B) In the celebratory pleasure over women's masochism and narcissism served up as 'a veritable feast of depravity and irresponsibility'[31] in Ulrike Ottinger's *Ticket of No Return*. About a woman who goes to Berlin to drink herself to death, this is 'a movie which is merely a celebration of that decision'.[32] After making this point, Rosenbaum still sees fit to deem Ottinger the 'Howard Hawks of the feminist avant-garde'[33] for the on-screen chuminess exhibited by her crew.

C) In the loophole, the 'moral point' of the films of Straub/Huillet through which representation can still take place: 'The spot – the only spot, the right spot – where their camera can catch people without bothering them.... To find this point, this *moral* point, is at this moment the entire art of the Straubs' (sic).[34] This impossible spot where representation can continue with its impossible work.

He might have begun where he left off. He might have begun to deal with the question he asks at the end of his book on the avant-garde regarding feminism and anti-narrative filmwork, regarding the avant-garde. And instead of asking Gidal, he might have gone to the film-makers themselves, Rose Lowder, Lis Rhodes and Susan Stein, to name but three. One certainly can't expect Rosenbaum to produce feminist film writing, but one can expect him not only to have overlooked but to have *worked against* what is avant-garde in the avant-garde film academy. Instead, *Film: The Front Line 1983* joins the growing mass of volumes on the radically phallocratic avant-garde academy, alongside P Adams Sitney's *Visionary Film*[35] and other such idealist tomes.

TOUTE UNE HEURE
CORINNE SQUIRE TALKS TO
CHANTAL AKERMAN

Editor's note: The interview below was conducted within limits more common to popular journalism (an hour's discussion during the 1983 London Film Festival) than to the carefully redacted tapings of scholarly record. Its brevity, if not superficiality, is self-evident – the sort of exchange deemed appropriate for the collection of a few quotations from the director-as-celebrity-*auteur*. It is published here, after some debate within the Editorial Board, for virtually opposing reasons – not to enhance any notion of 'Akerman' as author or authority, but to indicate other factors – institutional, economic, formal – which have recently influenced the work produced under that signature, and indeed throughout the various 'independent' sectors of cinema.

Corinne Squire: *I saw Toute Une Nuit in Paris last year, and maybe a quarter of the audience walked out....*

Chantal Akerman: Oh my god....

But that was quite interesting, it made me wonder who the people who stayed were. Here the film's being shown in the London Film Festival, and almost everyone will stay. It seems like you're making films for a different audience from before.

I think it's not a difficult film, *Toute Une Nuit.* Have you seen it again? In Paris the sound and images were very bad. Because it's not one main story, if the theatre quality is not good you lose everything, the atmosphere....In Brussels that film was shown in a normal theatre, a lot of people came, and maybe one or two left. I think they were well prepared. I had spoken about the film on TV and radio, so they were not getting nervous the first twenty minutes, when if you don't know, you try to relate one part of the film to another. Really my film is speaking about very simple things. If you just accept the form there's nothing difficult. I saw yesterday Sally Potter's film (*The Gold Diggers*). Okay, the form is not a usual form, but what she says, also, not everyone can relate to. What I show, everyone can relate to.

You said once that if you'd stayed in America you wouldn't ever have made narrative films.

When I was in the United States it was 1971, 2, 3, and at the time I didn't have any preoccupation with making film for theatres. There were a lot of people working like that, taking one or two reels, making a film like you make a painting. You were so far away from Hollywood in New York. There was no mixture at all between people who were making film like paintings, and the industry. But in France, it's not the same at all. I don't know . . . . I used to say this, but I don't know any more if it's true. Probably I would have gone naturally towards more narrative things.

As you got older?

No, it was also a question of the time there. Now, I really don't want to make a very experimental film that cannot be seen.

Are there any films like that? Even making the most experimental films, you choose a group to work with and show to.

You know, when I was young I was not aware of that at all: that you choose an audience, or that you can *have* an audience. I was just making a film to try some things that I wanted to try. Now, I try things for myself too, but I don't try the same kind of things. Now . . . I'm really mixed up, you know!

You said in another interview that you used to find narrative immoral.

I used to, yes. It's a very long time ago; you know I cannot even remember how I was then.

Right and opposite, scenes from *Toute Une Nuit*.

People are interested now in what you did before, in your whole body of work; that must be difficult for you.

It's difficult, because I want to keep going, I can't even talk about 'before' any more.

But you do quite a lot of interviews.

Marilyn (Watelet, the producer of *Toute Une Nuit*) says, 'Oh, six months ago, you said this to me', and I don't remember why I said it. I'm not a very reliable person to be interviewed.

I wanted to ask you about how you work now. You've said that it's impossible to work collectively.

No, I said that about *Jeanne Dielman*. It was collective like any film is collective. One person is doing camera, another person is doing lighting, and so on. But I didn't want to make a collective film with other people directing with me. Not of something I have written myself.

But you worked on a joint project with someone, 15/8.

That was not really a completed project. The two of us decided on Friday to make the film Saturday, and we just took the camera and some reels and we made it together, a friend of mine, Samy Szlingerbaum, and myself.

Do you still make films like that?

No, I don't.

How did you work on **Toute Une Nuit?**

We shot more than we used, and some didn't work. I wrote the little stories, and I knew how I would start. I knew also that the storm would be the end of the night, and I knew how I would finish. But then we found all the rest in editing the film.

Do you still work with a lot of women in the film crew? You used to make that choice.

Not so many, it's less conscious. I choose people who are good to work with, women or men. Yes, that's why it was so funny last night when Sally (Potter) and Helen (Grace) were talking (after the showing of *The Gold Diggers* and *Serious Undertakings*). They have that kind of ideal that I used to have, years ago.

What made you change?

It changes when you have done it. It changed because it happens like that; I didn't think about what I was doing. I met other people....

What about your new film?

The Eighties is a preparation for another film I want to make, a musical. It's auditions and things like that – but real auditions, not set-ups. I shot videotapes of people I might use in the next film. The musical is about love and business; it's a melodrama. *Toute Une Nuit* was not expensive, but the next film is an expensive film, so I don't find the money easily.

Why do you want to do a musical?

Oh, because it's lots of fun, and also because in a musical you don't have to be naturalistic, it's already stylised, and that is interesting. And I like to work with sound. It's intuitive, I don't know how I do it. I like to reconstruct natural sound, when you have a scene with sound you don't choose, noise or things like that. It's true, you construct the sound, like music. Again, it's stylised. I think the sound in Sally Potter's film was really fantastic.

Why is **The Eighties** *filmed in Brussels? Why is it an interesting city to film?*

Well, I lived there until I was eighteen. I prefer to shoot in Brussels than in Paris. It's more interesting because of the lines; it's more regular, it's more like New York. It's not like New York in everything, of course – but you can shoot along the lines.

What happened to the other film you were planning to do, with two people, a comedy?

I did it on TV for a series called *Camera in a Room*. Television is for making a living, but it's not only that, it's nice sometimes to make things on TV, especially for INA[1]. You have a lot of freedom and you can try things. It's only TV who can produce things like that, because it's not for a theatre. It's about 75 minutes, it's not commercial, it's not with stars. It's nice because you don't have to wait. You propose them a small outline, they give you some money to write a bit more. You don't have to go through a lot of commissioning and producers – they say 'yes' or 'no', and you know. It's nice!

You haven't used stars in your films.

But I'd like to if it's possible.

In the musical?

I don't know. We'll see. The film is all written. But I need a lot of money for it! After London, I'm going back to Paris to find it.

[1] France's *Institut National de l'Audiorisuel.*

THE SPACE FOR INNOVATION AND EXPERIMENT

SUE ASPINALL SURVEYS NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN BRITISH INDEPENDENT FILM

THIS ARTICLE falls into two parts. In the first, the current policies of the two major sources of funding for independent film and video work, the British Film Institute (BFI) and Channel Four, are outlined. In the second part, a few of the films themselves are examined more closely, both in relation to their conditions of production but also in relation to how an independent socialist feminist fiction film practice could develop in future.

I. THE FUNDERS

The British independent film sector is defined by its funding agencies, whose policies determine what films can be made, and how they are likely to be distributed. With no economic power of their own, independent film-makers have become familiar with chronic underfunding, and often only a brief exhibition of their work and generally poor distribution. In the spring of 1984, Channel Four's 'New Waves' season brought some of these films to the attention of a wider TV audience (often reaching 900,000 or more viewers). In May, a new BFI production, *The Gold Diggers*, opened with a run at the National Film Theatre, together with a supporting programme drawing out influences on the film's director, Sally Potter. *The Gold Diggers* was widely reviewed, and Potter also appeared on Channel Four's *Visions: Cinema* programme to discuss her work. Such exposure is an extremely rare experience for independent film and video makers.

Probably through a combination of choice and necessity, independent film-makers have been accustomed to practice what has been termed 'self-distribution', taking their films round to small audiences where discussion after the screening is intended as part of the cinematic experience. However, this practice has become less common in the last few years, which have seen the decline of the Independent Film-makers Association alongside a more general paralysis of the left. A few political documentaries such as Chris Reeves's *The Cause of Ireland* or commun-

ity-based documentaries such as *Bred and Born* made by the Four Corners Workshop in Bethnal Green continue to maintain a more direct approach to their audiences, as do the film and video workshops in general. Other recent films, such as *Doll's Eye* or *Brothers and Sisters*, although transmitted on Channel Four, have found a wider theatrical audience and a longer-term distribution more elusive. The longer narrative fiction feature often foregrounds aesthetic elements or some conception of 'entertainment' more than traditional documentary and correspondingly requires an audience which will respond not only to its politics but also to its aesthetics. The distinction between documentary and fiction is not a rigid one, however: increasingly, documentaries consciously interrogate form, structure and the epistemological claims of 'actuality'. The problem of distribution is not only a lack of committed distributors (The Other Cinema, Circles, Cinema of Women, the London Film Makers Co-op and Resistance Films are the most likely for this kind of work), but of generating a national film culture in which such work would be eagerly received and discussed.

The advent of Channel Four, with a Commissioning Editor for independent film, has provided new audiences for independent work. However, the tendency has been for independent work to adapt to television norms, to be presented in recognisable forms (i.e. the longer narrative feature, the work of an 'auteur'), rather than for television to adjust to the practices of the independent sector: non-standard running times, collective production, formal experiment, an emphasis on ideas rather than production values. Although many more people are seeing 'independent' work, there is little sense that such work arises from political and aesthetic debates carried on among film-makers, through film magazines and journals, and in film education.

The *Eleventh Hour* slot has not represented the full range of independent work: it has shown little from the avant-garde, little that has been

previously produced by the film and video workshops (other than full-length features). Work that has a sense of the provisional, experimental, *process*, is bypassed in favour of work with a certain professionalism: finished products. This may be justifiable and inevitable, but the process of adapting to television norms will have a profound effect on an independent film culture which does not seem as yet to have theorised or consciously debated these issues. Programmes such as Pictures of Women's *Sexuality* series are symptomatic of this process of adaptation. Familiar televisual devices such as graphics, interviews and talking heads are thrown together with interrupted shot: reverse shot sequences, circling cameras and adult education lectures in a hectic ragbag of styles and tones which veered uneasily from patronising to populist and back again. In this voyage into the realms of the televisual, independent film-makers are likely to get very seasick, unless they can clarify their strategy and answer some of the questions that face them, such as: is the Channel Four audience different from the Other Cinema audience? Does tape imply a different visual strategy from film? Do the experimental film strategies developed in the '60s and '70s work on television? How can political and aesthetic debates be developed in new ways for a television audience?

Channel Four has not only provided new audiences, however, it has also provided new funds. Independents Commissioning Editor Alan Fountain works with an annual budget of approximately £3 million. Of this, £1 million is spent on supporting film and video workshops which apply to carry out a programme of work, some of which may be broadcast; £400,000 goes to the British Film Institute for joint productions; and approximately £1½ million is spent on commissioning new films and scripts. This budget is larger than either that of the soon-to-be-privatised National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC) or the BFI, and has the potential to allow independent film-making to develop in new ways without the restrictions of shoestring budgets.

At the same time, the BFI has also found increased funds. As the other major funder of independent work, its Production Division operates only in the area of film, not videotape, and with a current annual production budget of approximately £923,000. It has moved away from its original designation as an 'Experimental Film Fund', set up in 1951, towards something like a 'small independent studio'.[1] The BFI's role was to produce shorts by apprentice film-makers. In the early '70s, the National Film School was established and the BFI Production Board began to set its sights on low-budget features, beginning with *Winstanley* in 1972. Throughout the early '70s, the Production Board funded a number of radical documentaries, such as *Ireland behind the Wire*, *Juvenile Liaison*, *Whose Choice?* and continued to fund some avant-garde work, including that of Sinden, Pound, Raban, Gidal and Welsby. Larger budgets in this period went to projects such as Gladwell's *Requiem for a Village* and the Bill Douglas trilogy, fitting into what seems to have been conceived as an attempt to create a British national film identity.

In the later '70s, the BFI's strategy of concentrating funding on fewer,

[1] Ruby Rich, 'The Very Model of a Modern Minor Industry', *American Film*, May 1983, p 47.

[2] John Ellis, 'Selection by Committee', in *The New Social Function of Cinema*, London, British Film Institute Production Board Catalogue 1979/80, p 16.

[3] John Hopewell, 'A Cinderella with Flat Feet', *AIP & Co* 52, March 1984, p 14.

larger projects was consolidated. The Board continued to fund a range of films, although its original commitment to experiment began to look increasingly half-hearted. As John Ellis argued in his account of Production Board decision-making, projects were 'allocated particular places within a model of cinema ... Each project becomes the ground on which general principles are explained, defended, attacked, pleaded for, denigrated ...'.[2] Short films of any kind were beginning to fade out of the picture, in line with the strategy of producing work which could be marketed in the art houses. The BFI increasingly tends to adopt the position that non-feature films do not have an audience and will languish on the shelf unless the film-makers themselves can produce one. And indeed, Four Corners' *Bred and Born* and the Rabans' *Black and Silver*, both recently produced by the BFI, are little known. During the late '70s/early '80s, the BFI produced features such as *Radio On* (directed by Chris Petit, 1979), *Brothers and Sisters* (directed by Richard Woolley, 1980) and *Maeve* (directed by Pat Murphy, 1981). Even their avant-garde moved towards a longer, more narrativised form, in work such as *Finnegan's Chin* (directed by Malcolm Le Grice, 1981) and *Crystal Gazing* (directed by Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, 1982).

The success of *The Draughtsman's Contract* (directed by Peter Greenaway, 1981) seems to have added impetus to the BFI strategy, although that film's development from a £120,000 experimental narrative into a £425,000 art house success happened 'despite the BFI, not because of it', according to its eventual producer, David Payne.[3] The BFI's surprise at the success of the film was undoubtedly due to its view of Greenaway's earlier work as marginal, experimental, audienceless. However, with an injection of impressive production values, a 'whodunnit' narrative and a name lead (Janet Suzman), the film found an audience among art cinema lovers who would have walked out of *A Walk Through H*. BFI Production Division Head Peter Sainsbury is now looking forward to further co-productions with Greenaway (contributing to budgets at between £600,000 and £700,000). In this escalation of budgets, the Institute is

A Walk Through H, directed by Peter Greenaway.
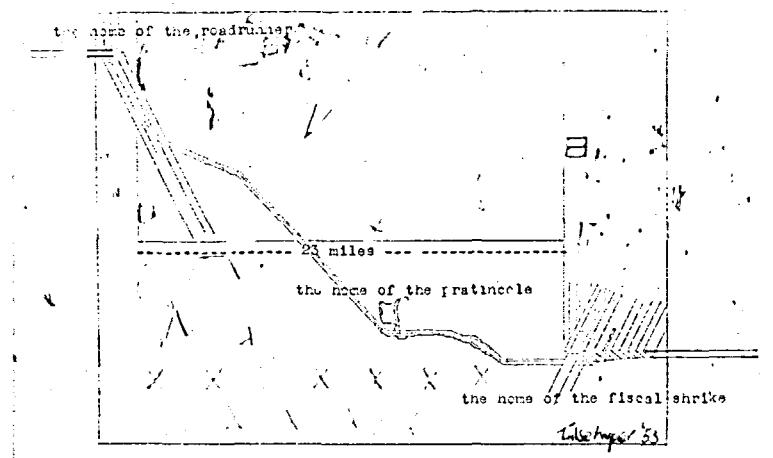
moving into the territory of the NFFC, whose annual £1½ million has hitherto been spent on commercial ventures such as *Loose Connections* (directed by Richard Eyre, 1983) and *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (directed by Chris Petit, 1981). It is no coincidence that the BFI recently co-funded Petit's *Flight to Berlin* (1983) which found a similar art house audience (at the Camden Plaza in London) for a similar type of thriller entertainment which was no more 'experimental' than *Unsuitable Job* had been. In moving into NFFC territory, the BFI has probably contributed to pushing it out further into the commercial mainstream, which is where the present Government now intends it to stay.

In 1983, Peter Sainsbury outlined his current strategy in terms of five 'operational priorities'[4]: 1) half a dozen script developments; 2) 'first production category' – films costing up to £100,000; 3) 'second production category' – films costing up to £300,000; 4) 'third production category' – films costing up to £500,000 into which the BFI would put a minor contribution; 5) promotion, distribution and sales. The range of film-making practices that this strategy covers is crucially dependent on what happens in the 'first production' category, which the paper goes on to admit has been allocated 'no real financial provision'. The paper is unclear as to whether it will fund several £20,000 projects or only one £100,000 project, or what seems even more likely – none at all.

Earlier that year, Sainsbury commented on 'the contradiction between funding of small apprentice works, and "nurturing" the work of those who've already made apprentice works'. He claimed that the Arts Council's grants to artists would provide support for low-budget, avant-garde work, and for the rest, he claimed that 'film teaching and the foundation of the Regional Arts Associations in the '70s had largely supplanted the original purpose of the Experimental Film Fund'. Is this really the case? For example, in 1982-3, the Greater London Arts Association (GLAA) offered between £1000 and £4000 to a mere seven
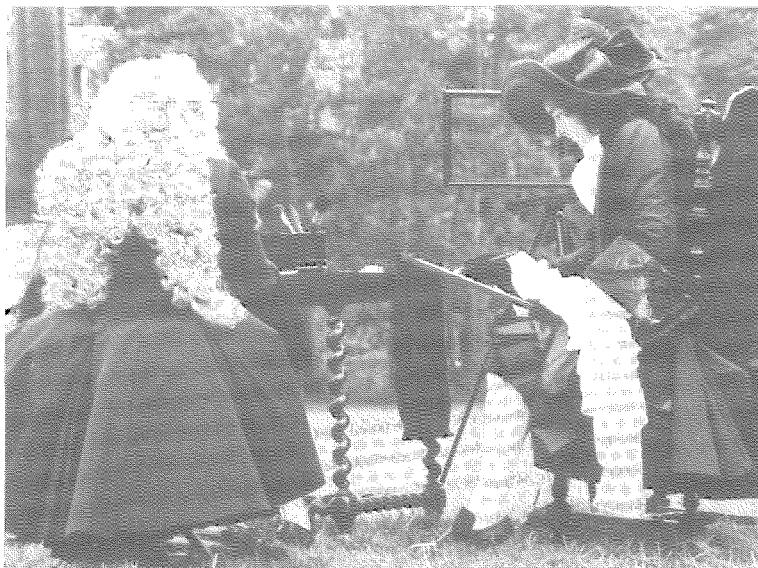
The Draughtsman's Contract (directed by Peter Greenaway, 1981)

projects, while a further twelve projects received around £250. Such tiny budgets, which do not include wages of any kind and cannot be made under any union agreement, are typical of regional grants and are also similar to production budgets in film education. Thus the relatively inexperienced film-maker is faced with a choice of making regionally funded work on a shoestring, or approaching Channel Four or the BFI for funding that is likely to be set at around £50,000 to £100,000 (or even more, if the BFI's 'first production' category is inoperational). Where is the 'nurturing' that would enable new film-makers to develop their strengths in shorts, documentaries and low-budget fictions?

The consequence of prioritising features that can be marketed through the art house cinemas has been the neglect of more radical productions. Although Sainsbury's paper talks of 'raising the £450,000 needed to finance an adequate intervention on this level' from 'commercial organi-sations', it seems an unlikely venture. Goldcrest financing *Song of the Shirt*? Clearly Sainsbury's main concern is not to build up a strong inde-pendent film culture, and the recent inclusion of more individuals repre-senting mainstream work on the Production Board indicates, rather, an interest in complementing the mainstream represented by films such as *Chariots of Fire* and *Gregory's Girl* and the middle class nostalgia of *Film on Four*, with slightly more radical versions such as *Ascendancy* (directed by Ed Bennett, 1983). When Sainsbury argues that narrative features must 'have budgets capable of buying the production values which will enable them to arrive in the market place with some authority', he has already made the leap from the role of cultural guardian to commercial competitor. However, since few BFI films can hope to produce a profit, these products are instead attuned to conceptions of status and 'author-ity', which please the cultured critics, win prizes at festivals and ensure a comfortable niche for British 'culture'.

II. THE FILMS

The two major funders might appear to be pulling in different direc-tions: one, towards television norms, and the other, towards the art house market (such as it is). But are these in fact so different? *Ascendancy* is typical of the art house style, while *Acceptable Levels* was acceptable television; both treated the question of Irish politics with a more pro-Republican perspective than is usually found either on film or TV – and in that sense were radical. Yet both also remained within traditional nar-rative forms which tied their meanings to what could be found in par-ticular characters in a particular situation. In *Ascendancy*, for example, the central protagonist is an upper-middle-class woman whose neuroses express some of the tensions of her political situation – surrounded by individuals whom she had understood only in personal terms as brother, boyfriend, father, maid, but whom she comes to recognise are positioned in relation to politics: her father is an Orange businessman who gets in-volved in politics because of his business associates; her brother has fought in the First World War and died; her soldier friend feels he acts only as an instrument of other forces; her Catholic maid becomes a

Ascendancy, directed by Ed Bennett.

victim in her Protestant household. The heroine expresses her alienation and disgust with the destructiveness of male politics through hysterical symptoms. Such a narrative cannot deal with the history of Irish 'troubles', nor with economic, political and material issues except insofar as they are experienced by the characters. The structure of such narratives deal only with the individual human experience of living within this nexus of social relationships; it does not provide knowledge or understanding of those social relations themselves.

Acceptable Levels (Frontroom, 1983) does not recreate the complexity of individual subjectivity within a particular political situation; it focuses instead on typical characters in order to present the argument that the media censors information about Ireland through certain structures in which these typical people are caught up. It makes its case competently, but here it is the very lack of individual complexity – the predictability of the earnest researcher, the flirtatious PA, the sexist crew, the opportunist director, etc – that makes the argument seem less powerful. They are pawns in the media game, the Irish are victims in the political game; we are not taken sufficiently far inside the experience of either the director or the family whose child is killed to feel more than a sense of fatalism. Nor are we taken far enough into the politics of media ideology to understand how and why such censorship operates, nor far enough into Irish anger and resistance to resist fatalism. The traditional narrative form moulds even radical arguments into something seamless and predictable, and Frontroom's use of characters to *illustrate* various political functions offers little challenge for the spectator.

Ascendancy falls into the art cinema tradition, offering visual pleasure, a certain complexity of character delineation and a subtle liberal/radical

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perspective; *Acceptable Levels* has the more prosaic quality of TV natur-
alism. Yet despite their political sympathies, both films offer only the
mildest of correctives to dominant mainstream film or TV. However,
both are competent, well-made films which realise effectively what they
set out to do, a claim that it is more difficult to make of many genuinely
innovative films.

Where these more radical and experimental films have suffered most
from their funders' strategies, however, (apart from the problem of
obtaining funding for such work in the first place) has been in their
failure to recognise the needs of film-makers accustomed to working with
documentary material on miniscule budgets, or in the case of the avant-
garde, perhaps working on Super 8 or with small quantities of stock. The
limitations of such circumstances often prevent film-makers from deve-
loping other skills. However, with increased funding, work in fiction
forms becomes a possibility. This opens up a new area, yet neither the
funders nor the film-makers have apparently been aware of the dangers
as well as potentials of this transition. To make the transition to the dom-
inant styles of mainstream fiction would involve the acquisition of a
range of skills – in directing actors, dialogue, lighting, creating sets, and
controlling the narrative pace – skills generally acquired through gradual
experience. Yet the funders' strategy provides no time or system for their
development.

A second problem arises from the fact that radical fiction has generally
been influenced by Brecht's rejection of traditional narrative in favour of
formal experiment. However, the Brechtian precedents in British
cinema – as opposed to that of Western Europe – are few and far
between. Surprisingly again, both funders and film-makers seem relativ-
ely unaware of the complexity and sheer labour involved in breaking
new ground instead of repeating familiar forms and techniques. The
funders themselves have not been in a position to offer strong editorial
advice or development because of their own lack of knowledge – although

Michael Relph's warning in 1976 that the Production Board must 'learn to differentiate between genuinely innovative work in this area and that in which creative naivety and technical ineptitude are cloaked by a facile pseudo-intellectualism'[5] revealed a recognition of the problem from a less than sympathetic point of view. The film-makers themselves seemed to shrink away from conducting public debates about their work as part of the process of learning how to make better films: Within a funding environment that was and is generally unreceptive of such work, the desire for praise, encouragement and further funds is not unsurprising — but the lack of robust critical debate and the tendency for critics to pull their punches in an environment where critics and film-makers are known to each other, has inevitably weakened this area of film-making. Where are the genuinely *critical* articles on the work of Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, Phil Mulloy, Richard Woolley, the Film Work Group, Mick Eaton, etc? Or on the contemporary application of Brechtian strategies to film-making, fiction, etc?[6] Without an energetic critique of finished work, fiction film-making with an allegiance to the Brechtian ideal will not develop.

Recent films which have attempted a radical approach to fiction have tended to combine fictional and documentary elements. The BFI-funded *Doll's Eye* (directed by Jan Worth, 1982) began as a project about male experiences of prostitutes, but developed into a fictional narrative about three women's experiences of work in London — one as a prostitute, one as a divorcée journalist, and one as a telephonist. Each woman represents a different class position, although they are linked by living in the same block of council flats. Character delineation is sketchy, the emphasis being on the social world rather than the inner experience. The film is episodic rather than constructed around plot and character. Although such fictions refuse the traditional pleasures of empathy and the entertainment of a story, Jan Worth claims that the film offers a different kind of entertainment: 'I think the idea that pleasure can only exist outside politics is a myth to start with; it's pleasurable for a lot of people who work to be offered a position where their bosses are questioned. So it's a question of pleasure for whom?'[7] While it may be true that a working-class audience enjoys *Doll's Eye* more than a middle-class one, the question of how far this film realises its own ambitions and aspirations still needs to be asked.

The Brechtian theory most frequently adopted by radical film-makers is that of the 'alienation effect'. This has been understood to require a refusal to let the spectator become emotionally involved with characters, in order to provide a critical distance from which to consider the proceedings. Brecht described it most clearly when he declared: 'To see one's mother as a man's wife one needs an A-effect; this is provided, for instance, when one acquires a step father'.[8] His aim was to alter perception, to reveal the material realities underlying the surface of the familiar. However this theory has generated much that has nothing whatever to do with refreshed perceptions, such as the scene from *Doll's Eye* in which Jackie the telephonist and her boyfriend Mick sit in front of a TV

5 Michael Relph, in John Ellis (ed), *Catalogue of British Film Institute Productions*, 1951-1976, London, 1976.

6 Articles by Sylvia Harvey ('Whose Brecht? Memories for the Eighties', *Screen* May-June 1982, vol 23 no 1, pp 45-59) and Paul Willemen ('An Avant Garde for the Eighties', *Framework* 24, Summer 1984, pp 53-83).

7 Quoted in Sylvia Harvey, 'Doll's Eye: An Interview with Jan Worth and Annie Brown', *Framework* 21, Summer 1983, p 53.

8 John Willett (ed), *Brecht in Context*, London, Eyre Methuen, 1984, p 22.
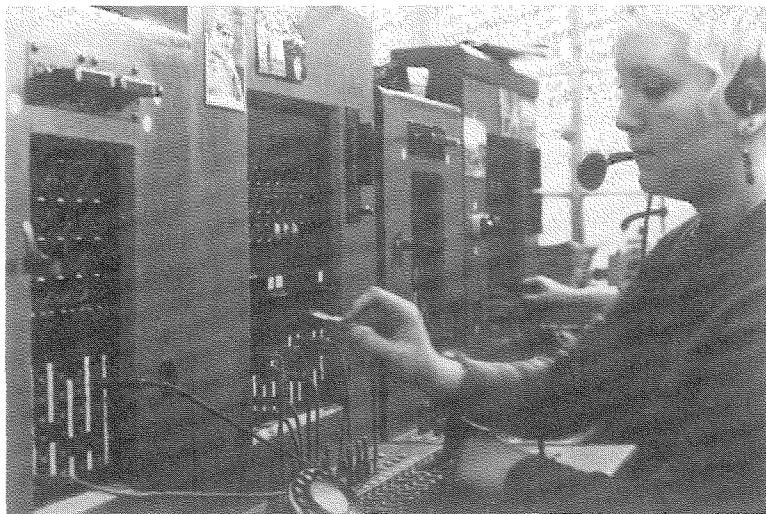
monitor playing back a programme about industry and technology. They remain seated for the length of their dialogue, which is delivered with little sense of two characters interacting. In fact, as an interaction it makes no claim to plausibility because the two already know each other well and would be unlikely to enter into such a conversation:

Mick: What do you feel like when you operate the switchboard?
Jackie: I switch to automatic. What did you feel on the assembly lines?
Mick: I hated the grease under my fingernails. Do you listen to 'em talking?
Jackie: When I get bored. Did you use to sabotage the line?
Mick: To stop feeling like part of the machinery.
Jackie: Do you think it makes a difference?
Mick: No, they include it in planning as part of the production quota.
Jackie: Did you feel useless on the dole?
Mick: Yeah. What about you on the switchboard?
Jackie: I just connect bosses. I ain't got no stakes in it. Did you feel useful when you had a job?
Mick: No, but you can see the use in tractors.
Jackie: So why did they close the plant?
Mick: Because the tractors weren't making any profit. Your only use is to the bosses. Are you afraid of losing your job?
Jackie: Yes, I'm on a 15 hour week – that's one hour away from job protection.
Mick: 40 hours is no guarantee.
Jackie: Were you organised?
Mick: The union said no redundancies and the bosses threatened to close factories.
Jackie: Did you have a choice?
Mick: Union leadership worked out a compromise – no jobs for some, and short time for all . . . Those were the bosses' choices. (They start to exit) The shop steward had to barter – men for money. He resigned.
Jackie: Did he say it was in your interests?
Mick: Yeah. Take a cut in wages all for the sake of progress.

This dialogue is ironically counterpointed by the programme's voice-over which ends at this point with Mrs Thatcher confidently asserting that 'people are much more adaptable than you think'.

This scene offers no shock of revelation, no sense of exposing the strange underpinning of the 'natural'. The dialogue is only too predictable,- a summary of a particular political position on the alienation of labour and the role of the trade unions in managing the decline of late capitalism. The characters stand in for the general experience of a whole sector of the working class.

The material is introduced simply as a form of statement. In an interview, co-writer Annie Brown defends this scene for its avoidance of the type of crude didacticism which arises when plausible characters are suddenly found making a political point on behalf of the director, which she dislikes 'because of the attempt to naturalise it'.[9] *Doll's Eye* is not didactic in the sense of having an identifiable 'message' which it is trying to 'teach' its audience. Yet, although one is not tempted to accept ideas because of identification with the characters, Jackie and Mick are presented as 'typical' of working class experience and theirs, in a sense, is the authorised version not questioned elsewhere in the film.

The assumption running through *Doll's Eye* is that the representation of character and emotion prevents the spectator from reaching a better understanding of the social dimension of experience. In the movement away from traditional narrative's absorption in subjective experience, independent film-makers have tended instead to treat characters as ciphers for ideas, theories, arguments about the public sphere, while abandoning psychology, subjectivity, and the personal sphere to 'art' cinema. This tendency, which may appear to stem from Brecht's writings, in my view is based on a misconception of his theory. Although his extensive theoretical notes and articles do contain contradictions and reworkings, there is a consistency in Brecht's approach to the question of character and emotion which can be summarised. Over a period of 30 years, from the late '20s to the late '50s, Brecht consistently argued against empathy, against the stimulation of emotion for its own sake. He wanted to report on human existence, to observe it, in order to understand it better. He emphasised that emotions were not natural or timeless, that they had a class basis, and that individuals were 'the sum of all social circumstances'[10]. His concern was to show individuals as subject to change and development, and therefore he rejected the presentation of character as 'so natural, so impossible to conceive any other way'[11] because this implied that human nature was immutable, that 'new emotions' were impossible. In situating their characters in their work environments, the makers of *Doll's Eye* have certainly moved in the direction of a social and material understanding of them. However, there is little sense of individual history or emotional change; we observe the characters, but because they are insufficiently characterised, we have little interest in them.

Brecht saw the understanding of emotion as much a part of social knowledge as the understanding of economic and political realities, and

9 Quoted in Sylvia Harvey, 'Doll's Eye...', op cit, p 52.

10 John Willett (ed), *Brecht on Theatre*, London, Eyre Methuen, 1973, p 46.

11 ibid, p 234.

[12] ibid, p 151.

[13] ibid, p 248.

[14] ibid, p 101.

[15] ibid, p 277.

[16] ibid, p 271.

noted the theatre's power as 'virtually ... a fashion show, parading not only the latest dresses but the latest ways of behaving ... '. 'It matters how love, marriage, work and death are treated on the stage, what kind of ideals are set up and propagated for lovers, for men struggling for their existence and so on.'[12] He was also clear that to understand emotion, it would have to be represented, that while 'we make no attempt to share the emotions of the characters we portray, these emotions must nonetheless be fully and movingly represented.'[13] Again, 'A creation that more or less renounces empathy need not by any means be an "unfeeling" creation, or one which leaves the spectator's feelings out of account. But it has to adopt a critical approach to his emotions.'[14]

To produce this critical approach, Brecht favoured a style of acting which would 'show' behaviour, a kind of acting he suggests is produced when a director demonstrates to an actor how to play a particular passage in a play – s/he is not totally transformed into the character, nor in a trance. His or her acting has a provisional feel about it. Brecht suggests that there will always be some degree of identification by the actor, and that it is this 'truly rending contradiction between experience and portrayal, empathy and demonstration, justification and criticism, which is what is aimed at'.[15] The spectator is expected to share and observe emotion simultaneously. Whether or not this particular solution to the critical presentation of emotion is as appropriate for film as theatre (a question which would be worth pursuing), Brecht was certainly interested in emotional life and its representation.

The representation of emotion in *Doll's Eye* is in a particularly negative form. The characters' lives are tenuously linked by the fact that they all live on the same estate, but their inter-relations are not the subject of the film. Nor are their individual domestic lives or personal sexual relationships fully articulated. However, the perfunctory nature of all the relationships within the diegesis is what the film-makers have chosen to depict. The three female characters are portrayed as alienated, cynical and in retreat from intimacy. Their bitterness and self-pity, exemplified by remarks such as 'Didn't you know? Love makes the world go round', the lack of warmth in relationships between men and women but also between the women themselves, give the film its sterile tone. The emphasis on negative emotion offers little sense of contradiction within character, and produces a sense of indifference in the spectator.

In Brecht's 'Conversation about being forced into empathy', he makes it clear that the purpose of distanciation is to allow intellectual understanding to accompany emotional engagement:

Suppose a sister is mourning her brother's departure for the war; and it is the peasant war: he is a peasant, off to join the peasants. Are we to surrender to her sorrow completely? Or not at all? We must be able to surrender to her sorrow and at the same time not to. Our actual emotion will come from recognising and feeling the incident's double aspect.[16]

Doll's Eye does not move *between* 'justification and criticism', 'empathy and demonstration' of its characters; the film presents their emotional

negativity as the norm. While such a film may avoid the sentimentality and false hope which are so prevalent in Hollywood narratives, the film-makers have fallen into the opposite trap, of equating pessimism with realism. Annie Brown claims that 'Most people, that is working class people, haven't got that possibility of making choices, so they can't be subjects for a delightful, complex psycho-drama about what choices there are to make given that there is this terrible backdrop of the strug-gle.'[17] This view of the working class as locked into the struggle for survival with no time for the luxury of emotions has a way of reducing all working class experience to the category of 'oppression', a tendency in accord with the British naturalistic tradition, exemplified by Loach/Gar-nett/Allen/Joffe's pessimistic exposés of working class victims. As Alan Bleasdale has demonstrated in *Boys From The Blackstuff*, it is possible to illustrate a much wider range of emotions experienced by the oppres-sed – humour, determination, imagination, anger, pride, enthusiams, greed, boredom, sadness and generosity. Although limited by its conven-tional narrative form, the spirit of Bleasdale's work is arguably closer to Brecht's idea of spectatorship than many more obviously experimental films.

The more overtly 'Brechtian' approach of *Doll's Eye* serves to rational-ise what appears to be a lack of interest in emotions, motivations, and relationships. Instead of developing a sense of where emotions come from, how they are influenced by social structures, and how to put emo-tional energy to better use, *Doll's Eye* offers only a nihilistic vision of oppression and resentment.

Family Fragments (Baggott and Fountain, 1984)[18] combines a docu-mentary portrait of the Fountain family with fictional representations of a working class family, together with a fictional friendship between two men. The experience of family life and the problems created by the sexual division of labour are explored through each of these elements within the film. The participants' efforts to deal honestly with their own experience through the documentary fragments is one way of producing a materialist approach to the emotions: the spectator hears 'about' them, recognises them, is moved by them, yet does not become submerged in them; the presence of the camera facing the speaker in static shots, or framing the speakers from behind, or wandering away from the one who is speaking, creates a distance from these lives but also the potential space to enable spectators to connect their own memories or reflections.

However, the fictional elements are more problematic. As in *Doll's Eye*, characters are put into place to represent certain typical experien-ces: in this case a working class couple's changing social roles. The hus-band, who has hitherto found self-esteem as a breadwinner, has diffi-culty in accepting his own redundancy and increased involvement in childcare, while the wife, whose identity has been tied up in childcare, learns new self-esteem through her increasing involvement in trade unionism. These scenes are sketches of a situation which reveal its gene-ral features, but lack the vitality of the particular, which the document-ary fragments do possess. Occasional scenes – such as the one where the

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[17] Quoted in Sylvia Harvey, 'Doll's Eye...', op cit, p 51.

[18] Although it has not had a theatrical release or broadcast as yet, it is available from The Other Cinema, 79 Wardour Street, London W1.

Family Fragments,
directed by Jeff Bag-
gott and Alan
Fountain.
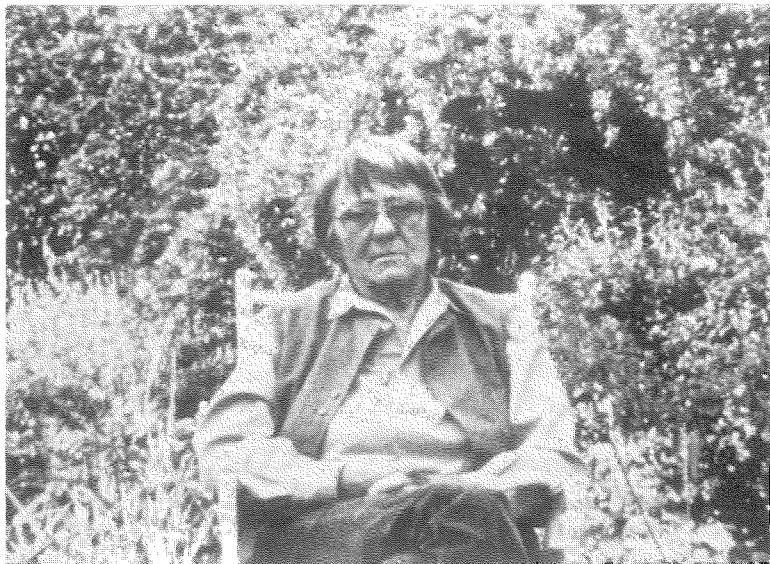
couple in bed together alternately address the camera about their feelings
about sexuality – suggest that when characters are presented less schema-
tically and less predictably, with some sense of internal contradiction,
the fiction becomes more productive.

Mick Eaton's *Darkest England*, 1984 (recently transmitted on the
Eleventh Hour's New Wave series), deals with the hypocrisy of imperial-
ist masculinity, with its ignorance of British poverty at home and of its
own repressed sexuality. Again, it combines fictional with documentary
elements, but here the fiction is a playful enactment of certain discourses
around sexuality and imperialism rather than an attempt to reproduce or
demonstrate individual subjectivity. Although the elements of docu-
mentary and fiction are very successfully combined (as they are not in
Family Fragments), in containing the ideas of the film within the terrain
of 'history', connections between Victorian discourses and present con-
sciousness can only be suggested, not developed. Ideas 'about' history,
or ideas 'about' representation, are ultimately academic, if they do not
have the power to connect to contemporary feelings, experiences and
understanding. Conversely, despite its weaknesses precisely on this level
of the wider discourses circulating in society, about sexuality, the family
and history, *Family Fragments* is prepared to take the risk of dealing with
the present.

The Brechtian approach to formal strategy is bound up with what will
make the spectator *see*, see freshly, question, 'get moving', think and feel
differently. In developing radical fiction in cinema or on television this
must surely be the central criterion. Although films such as *Ascendancy*
or *Acceptable Levels* may add a certain respectability to political views
marginalised by the dominant culture, they do not enable a new kind of
'seeing'. However, in any aesthetic strategy the relationship with the
audience is crucial and the potential for reaching different audiences
through television or through feature-length films raises many questions

Darkest England,
directed by Mick
Eaton.

about how to stimulate and surprise, how to get these audiences 'moving' in the late 1980s. The current trend for both Channel Four and the BFI to seek only well-polished narrative products militates against such a practice, which is at present embryonic (best represented by the approach of *Doll's Eye*) and which represents a complex and difficult task which will involve funders in taking risks. Those who wish to be involved in this process must ensure that the funders make the space for such a practice to be developed.

WINNING THE GAME WHEN THE RULES HAVE BEEN CHANGED: ART PHOTOGRAPHY AND POSTMODERNISM

BY ABIGAIL SOLOMON GODEAU

I WOULD LIKE to begin this discussion with a brief consideration of two images: one, a canonical photograph of high modernist art photography made in 1926; the other, a work made in 1979 by a postmodernist artist with no allegiance – either pedagogical, formal, or professional – to art photography *per se*. The first is Edward Weston's study – one of a series – of his son Neil; the second is a rephotograph of the Edward Weston photograph by Sherrie Levine, an artist whose practice for the past six years or so has been to rephotograph photographs or, more recently, paintings and drawings by German Expressionist artists, and to present them as her own.

We may begin by legitimately asking what is the difference between the two works. In the context of their reproduction in these pages, there very obviously is no difference whatsoever. Were we, however, to put the actual vintage print of Weston's *Neil* next to Levine's rephotographed print and examine them side by side, a certain amount of difference would be apparent. Variations in tonality of the prints, amount of detail, sharpness and delicacy of the forms and shadows, etc, could then be easily distinguished. But inasmuch as most people who can immediately recognise Weston's study of Neil are most likely to know it from reproductions in books and magazines, we might also say that the difference between the photograph by Weston and the photograph by Levine does not in any way represent a fundamental or essential one.

What then *is* the difference between these two images? We might begin by stating that while Weston is the *author* of the portrait of Neil, Levine is the thief, or, put somewhat less baldly, the confiscator, the plagiarist, the appropriator, the *pasticheur*. But to have said that is really to have said very little, because the theft of this particular image is in every sense both obvious and transparent. Even with Sherrie Levine's name typed neatly below the image when it is exhibited, who after all would mistake Levine's purloined *Neil* for the real thing?
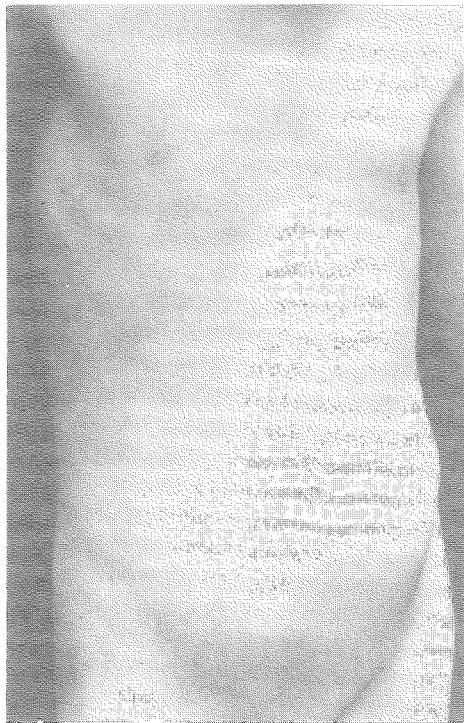
But what do we mean when we talk about the *real thing*? Were we referring to Manet's *Olympia* or to Vermeer's *View of Delft* there would be little ambiguity. The real *Olympia* is installed in the Jeu de Paume, in Paris; the *View of Delft* in the Mauritshuis in The Hague. Both are singular, unique. The real thing in reference to *Olympia* would never be taken to refer to the actual model – Victorine Meurand – any more than it would be confused with Manet's conception of a Second Empire courtesan. Still less would the real thing be conflated with the reproduction of it in Janson's *History of Art*. Similarly, although Vermeer's *View of Delft* is a minutely detailed view of the city, we know the real thing is not the city, but Vermeer's rendering of it. Are these notions of authenticity and singularity the same when we speak of Weston's study of Neil as the real thing?

To answer this query we must begin by acknowledging that although there is but one negative of this individual study of Neil, there are any number of prints made from the negative by Weston himself. Additionally, there exist prints made by Cole Weston bearing the imprimatur of the estate, and presumably printed with the privileged knowledge and insight regarding Weston's formal intentions that such an enterprise would imply. There is also a limited edition of prints made by George Tice some years ago, commissioned (I believe) by Lee Witkin and the Weston estate, of an extreme exquisiteness that would have made Weston *père* quite happy. Finally, there are the scores of reproductions of Weston's *Neil* gracing everything from the cover of *The Male Nude* to the various monographs and exhibition catalogues on Edward Weston or

the f/64 group, or the art and history of photography itself. Where then are we to locate the real thing in relation to this particular image?

Carrying the inquiry a bit further, we might here examine the nature and quality of Weston's photograph, which may be justly described as a virtual icon of photographic modernism, an exemplar of Weston's mature style, and a monument to the rigorous and controlled perfection of so-called straight art photography. Certainly the authority and classical beauty of this photograph derives in part from our knowledgeable recognition of precisely that source of beauty Weston drew upon, viewed, framed, and represented in the person of his son Neil. It is, of course, the stylised perfection of Praxiteles' or Phidias' marble nudes that we see in Neil's living torso: the flesh made art as much as the three dimensions of the body have been transformed into two. Headless, armless, legless, even genital-less, this fragment of Neil speaks primarily of pure form. Its eroticism, while present, is tamed — subordinated to the aesthetic which, in any case, constitutes the historic ground rules for the presentation of the nude. But must we not, in the final analysis, consider the real thing to be, at least in part, the living Neil in the year 1926? And does not this final acknowledgment that this originary point must be — as it is for all photography — the living world which has been imprinted on paper further problematise the search for the real thing? Sherrie Levine in fact remarked that when she showed her photographs to a friend he said that they only made him want to see the originals. 'Of course,' she replied, 'and the originals make you want to see that little boy, but when you see the boy, the art is gone.' And elaborating on this comment, Douglas Crimp has commented:

> For the desire that is initiated by that representation does not come to closure around that little boy, is not at all satisfied by him. The desire of representation exists only insofar that it never be fulfilled, insofar as the original always be deferred. It is only in the absence of the original that representation may take place. And representation takes place because it is already there in the world as representation. It was of course, Weston himself who said that 'the photograph must be visualized in full before the exposure is made.' Levine has taken the master at his word and in so doing has shown him what he really meant. The a priori Weston had in mind was not really in his mind at all; it was in the world and Weston only copied it.[1]

But Sherrie Levine is concerned with more than making a point about the conditions of representation, more too than underscoring the rather murky notion of what constitutes an 'original' within a technology of mechanical reproduction. Like Melville's Bartleby the Scrivener, Levine's critical stance is manifested as an act of refusal: refusal of authorship, uncompromising rejection of all notions of self-expression, originality, or subjectivity. Levine, as has been pointed out often enough, does not make photographs; she takes photographs, and this act of confiscation, as much as the kinds of images she takes, generates a complex analysis and critique of the forms, meanings and conventions of photographic imagery (particularly that which has become canonised as

[1] Douglas Crimp, 'The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism', October 15, Winter, 1980, pp 91-100. An indispensable essay on the subject, to which my own is much indebted. Crimp discusses at some length Levine's position within post-modernist theory and practice. See also Rosalind Krauss. 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde: A Postmodernist Reception', October 18, Fall, 1981, pp 46-66.

art) at the same time that it comments obliquely on the implications of photography as a museum art.

In earlier work dealing with photography, Levine made copy photographs of reproductions of photographs printed in books or posters, as in the case of the Weston studies of Neil. Alternatively – for example, in her rephotographs of Walker Evans' FSA photographs – she made copy prints of copy prints. Thus, while conceptually creating a photographic hall of mirrors effect, Levine cogently demonstrated the contradictions implicit in the assimilation of photography into traditional art discourse. Inasmuch as appropriation functions by putting visual quotation marks around the stolen image, its critical application lies in its ability to compel the viewer to see dialectically. In Levine's rephotographs of Eliot Porter's trees, the mere act of their confiscation, displacement, and re-presentation, enables the viewer to grasp immediately the wholly conventional (and, as Roland Barthes would have said, entirely mythological) scheme in which 'Nature' is made to be seen as 'Beautiful'. Unlike the international typologies of industrial structures made by Hilla and Bernd Becher, the Porter photographs are revealed as unintentional typologies; artifacts of culture no less than the Bechers' steel mills and water towers. Similarly, the rephotographed Walker Evans photographs, whose graininess and obvious screen clearly attest to their already-reproduced status, underline the cultural and representational codes that structure our reading of (respectively) the Great Depression, the rural poor, female social victims, and the *style* of Walker Evans.

Levine's refusal of traditional notions of authorship has social and political implications as well. The word 'author' is etymologically linked to that of 'authority' just as it is to 'authorise'. Historically, the concept of the author is linked to that of property in that the production of the author comes, within the framework of capitalist development, to be understood as property. Copyright legislation protects that property, and in fact Levine's Weston and Porter rephotographs are quite literally illegal works of art. Too, the notion of the author is integrally linked with that of patriarchy; to contest the dominance of the one, is implicitly to contest the power of the other. Enacted against the larger art world context characterised by the cynical (and as has been often noted, predominantly male) effusions of neo-expressionist macho pastiche,

Levine's acerbic and deadpan confiscations serve efficiently to expose the hollowness as well as the specious atavism of such work. To refuse authorship itself functions to puncture the ideology of the artist as the bearer of a privileged subjectivity. Levine is thus a kind of guerrilla feminist within the precincts of the art world – a position shared by a number of other artists using photography within the postmodernist camp.

I chose to begin this essay with a discussion of Sherrie Levine's work because it illustrates in a rather forceful and dramatic way that the methods and assumptions of traditional art photography and those of various artists employing photography outside the conventional framework of art photography have come to occupy antipodes within photographic discourse and practice. Levine's work often provokes outrage, nowhere more evident than among the ranks of art photographers. If after a hundred and fifty years of upwardly mobile striving, art photography has been definitively validated as a 'creative' fine art, what does it mean that artists such as Levine should so energetically jettison those very values which elevated photography to parity with the other arts? Levine, now in her mid-thirties, has emerged from the art world, as have a considerable number of other artists using photography such as Vikky Alexander, James Casebere, Sarah Charlesworth, Silvia Kolbowski, Barbara Kruger, Richard Prince, Laurie Simmons, Cindy Sherman and Jim Welling. They are themselves linked to an older generation of artists such as John Baldessari or, for that matter, Andy Warhol. The list could easily be extended to include a wide range of artists using photography since the mid-sixties that would encompass artists as disparate as the Bechers, Victor Burgin, Jan Dibbets, Gilbert & George, Dan Graham, Joseph Kosuth, Ed Ruscha, Jeff Wall and William Wegman. As photography galleries have crumpled left and right (in New York in 1983, the casualty lists included Light Gallery, Photograph Gallery, Robert Samuels Gallery, and the Photographic Division of Leo Castelli) Cindy Sherman's star, for example, has risen meteorically. As the Photography Department of the Museum of Modern Art drifts into blue chip senility with no less than four Atget exhibitions or feeble resuscitations of formalist schema ('Big Pictures'), artists employing photography are in increasing numbers being absorbed into the mainstream art gallery nexus.

These two simultaneous developments – the ghettoisation and marginality of art photography at precisely the moment when the use of photography by artists has become a relative commonplace – deserves some scrutiny. In order to understand the conceptual cul-de-sac that contemporary art photography represents, it is important to trace the assumptions and claims that paralleled (and fueled) its trajectory and then to examine the merit and usefulness of these notions as they exist in the present.

It has long been an uncontested claim in standard photographic history that the work of Paul Strand done in the late teens – and more particularly, its championship by Alfred Stieglitz in the last two issues of

Camera Work – signalled the coming of age of art photography as an authentically modernist, and hence, fully self-conscious art form. For while Stieglitz himself had for most of his career made unmanipulated 'straight' prints, it was Strand's uncompromising formulation of the aesthetics of straight photography, his insistence that photographic excellence lay in the celebration of those very qualities intrinsic to the medium itself, that has traditionally been viewed as the moment of reorientation and renewal of American art photography.

Stieglitz's epiphanous designation of Strand as the aesthetic heir apparent would seem a reasonable point of demarcation in the art history of American photography. For although the insistence that the camera possesses its own unique aesthetic has been asserted in various ways since the 1850s, the pictorialist phenomenon supplanted earlier concepts of photographic integrity or purity[2] and instead established a quite different aesthetic agenda. This agenda, however, had a pedigree fully as vulnerable as that of the proto-formalist one: specifically, the presumption that photography, like all the traditional visual arts, could lay claim to the province of the imaginary, the subjective, the inventive – in short, all that might be inscribed within the idea of the *creative*.

The specific strategies adapted by pictorialist photographers – be they the retrieval of artisanal printing processes, the appropriation of high art subject matter (F Holland Day crucified on the Cross, Gertrude Kasebier's Holy Families, etc), or the use of gum bichromate and other substances, with extensive working of the negative or print and the con-commitant stress on fine photography as the work of hand as well as eye – are now generally supposed to constitute an historical example of the misplaced, but ultimately important energies of art photography at an earlier stage of evolution. Misplaced, because current 'markers' and print manipulators notwithstanding, contemporary photographic taste is predominantly formalist; important, because the activities and pro-duction of the Photo-Secession were a significant and effective lobby for the legitimation of photography as art. Thus, if on the one hand, Edward Steichen's 1901 self-portrait, in which the photographer is represented as a painter and the pigment print itself disguised as a work of graphic art, is now reckoned to be distinctly un-modernist in its con-ception, on the other hand, the impulses that determined its making can be retrospectively recuperated for the progressive camp. Viewed from this position, photography's aspiration to the condition of painting by emulating either the subject or the look of painting was considered by the 1920s and the accompanying emergence of the post-Pictorialist generation – Sheeler, Strand, Weston and the others – to have been an error of means, if not ends.

What I here wish to argue is that the *ends* of mainstream art photo-graphy, what we might consider as its methods or ideology, have remained substantially unchanged throughout all its various permut-ations – stylistic, technological, and cultural – that it has undergone during its hundred and forty year history. Of far greater importance than the particular manifestations and productions of art photography is the
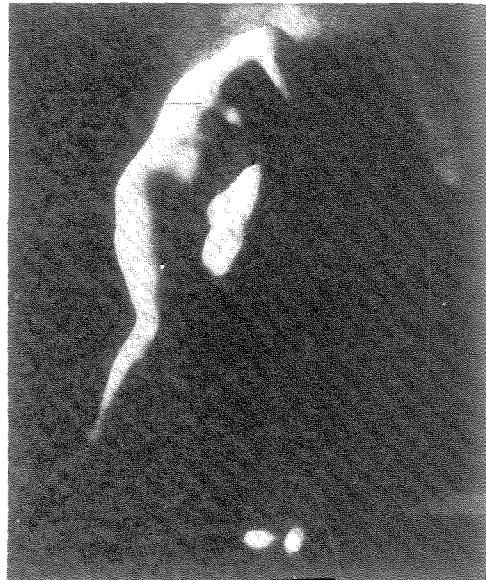
Left, Edward Stei-
chen, Self Portrait,
1901. Right, Edward
Steichen, In Memor-
iam, 1904.

examination of the conditions that define and determine them. What needs to be stressed is that an almost exclusive concentration on the stylistic developments in art photography, no less than the accompanying preoccupation with its exemplary practitioners, tends to obscure the structural continuities between the 'retrograde' pictorialism of the earlier part of the century and the triumphant modernism of its successors. Steichen's tenebrous platinum and gum print nude of 1904 entitled 'In Memoriam' might well seem on the stylistic evidence light years away from the almost hallucinatory clarity of Weston's work of the '30s, but Steichen's 'it is the artist that creates a work of art, not the medium' and Weston's 'man is the actual medium of expression – not the tool he elects to use as a means' are for all intents and purposes virtually identical formulations. The shared conviction that the art photograph is the expression of the photographer's interior, rather than or in addition to the world's exterior, is, of course, *the* doxa of art photography and has been a staple of photographic criticism almost from the medium's inception. Implicit in the notion of the photographer's expressive mediation of the world through the use of his or her instrument is a related constellation of assumptions: originality, authorship, authenticity, the primacy of subjectivity, assumptions immediately recognisable as those belonging to what Walter Benjamin termed the theology of art. It is the hegemony of these assumptions that integrates within a unified field the photography of Clarence White and Tod Papageorge, the criticism of Sadakichi Hartmann and John Szarkowski. Such is the continuing value and prestige of these notions in photographic criticism and history that they tend to be promiscuously imposed on just about any photographic oeuvre which presents itself as an appropriate

subject for contemporary connoisseurship. Thomson and Riis, Atget and Weegee, Salzmann and Russell, Missions Héliographiques or 49th Parallel Survey: all tend finally to be grist for the aesthetic mill, irrespective of intention, purpose, application or context.

Insofar as such concepts as originality, self expression and subjectivity have functioned, at least since romanticism, as the very warranty of art, the claims of art photography were *a priori* ordained to be couched in precisely such terms. 'Nature viewed through a temperament' could be grafted onto the photographic enterprise as easily as to painting or literature and could, moreover, encompass both maker and machine. Thus was met the first necessary condition of the *genus* art photography: that it be considered, at very least by its partisans, as an expressive as well as transcriptive medium.

Why then the need for a pictorialist style at all? And to the extent that exponents of art photography since the 1850s had established a substantial body of argument bolstering the claims to photographic subjectivity, interpretive ability and expressive potential, why nearly half a century later was the battle refought specifically on painting's terms?

Certainly one contributing factor, a factor somewhat elided in the art history of photography, was the second wave of technological innovation that occurred in the 1880s. The fortunes of art photography, no less than those of scientific, documentary, or entrepreneurial photography, have always been materially determined by developments in its technologies and most specifically by its progressive industrialisation.[3] The decade of the eighties witnessed not only the perfection of photogravure and other forms of photomechanical reproduction (making possible the photographically illustrated newspaper and magazine), but the introduction and widespread dissemination of the gelatino-bromide dry plates, perfected enlargers, hand cameras, rapid printing papers, orthochromatic film and plates, and last but not least, the Kodak push button camera. The resulting quantum leap in the sheer ubiquity of photography, its vastly increased accessibility (even to children, as was now advertised) and the accompanying diminution in the amount of expertise and know-how required to both take and process photographs, compelled the art photographer to separate in every way possible his or her work from that of the common run of commerical portraitist, Sunday amateur, or family chronicler. In this context, too, it should be pointed out that pictorialism was an international style: in France its most illustrious practitioners were Robert Demachy and Camille Puyo; in Germany Heinrich Kuhn, Frank Eugene, Hugo Henneberg and others were working along the same lines, and in the States, Stieglitz and the other members of the Secession effectively promoted pictorialism as the official style of art photography. And while influences ranging from symbolism, the arts and crafts movement, *l'art pour l'art*, and Jungenstil variously informed the practice of art photography in all these countries, the primary fact to be reckoned with is that art photography has always defined itself — indeed, was compelled to define itself — in opposition to the normative uses and boundless ubiquity of all other photography.

[3] See in this light, Bernard Edelman, *Ownership of the Image: Elements for a Marxist Theory of Law*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.

[4] In 1937 the important exhibition on the history of photography was munted at the Museum of Modern Art which resulted in Beaumont Newhall's now standard text *History of Photography*. For a discussion of the significance of this exhibition, see Christopher Phillips, 'The Judgment Seat of Photography', *October 22*, Fall, 1982, pp 27-63.

It is suggestive, too, that the pictorialist and Photo-Secession period involved the first comprehensive look at early photography. Calotypes by David Octavious Hill and Robert Adamson and albumen prints by Julia Margaret Cameron were reproduced in *Camera Work*, Alvin Langdon Coburn printed positives from negatives by Hill and Adamson, Thomas Keith and Lewis Carroll, and exhibitions of nineteenth-century photography were mounted· in France, Germany and Great Britain. These activities were to peak in 1939,[4] the centenary of the public announcement of the daguerreotype, and were to be matched (in fact, exceeded substantially) only in the decades following 1960.

One need not belabour the point to see certain correspondences between the art photography scene of the period of the Photo-Secession and that of the past fifteeen years. If gum and oil prints are perhaps not in evidence, contemporary photography galleries and exhibitions are nonetheless replete with the products of 8×10 view cameras, palladium prints, platinum prints, dye transfer prints, etc. Such strategies are as much mandated by a thoroughly aestheticised notion of photography as they are by the demands of the art photography market. To those who would counter such a categorisation with remonstrations as to the increasing shoddiness of commercially manufactured materials and the need for archival permanence, I would simply reassert that the art photographer's· aspirations to formal invention, individual expression and signatural style are perpetually circumscribed, if not determined, by manufacturing and production decisions. Indeed, the very size and shape of the photographic image are the result of industrial decisions; the requirements of artists were only taken into account in camera design for a brief historical moment well before the industrialisation of photography.

When the legacy of art photography passed from pictorialism to what Stieglitz described as the 'brutally direct' photographic production of Strand and his great contemporaries, a crucial and necessary displacement of the art in art· photography was required. No longer located in particular kinds of subject matter, in the blurred and gauzy effects of soft focus or manipulations of negative or print, in allegorical or symbolic meanings, the locus of art was now squarely placed within the sensibility – be it eye or mind – of the photographers themselves. Thus from Heinrich Kuhn's 'the photographic instrument, the lifeless machine, is compelled by the superior will of the personality to play the role of the subordinate' through Paul Strand's formulation of photography as instrumental 'to an even fuller and more intense self-realisation' to Walker Evans' litany of art photography's 'immaterial qualities, from the realms of the subjective' among which he included 'perception and penetration: authority and its cousin, assurance, originality of vision, or image innovation; exploration; invention' to, finally, Tod Papageorge's 'as I have gotten older, however, and have continued to work, I have become more concerned with expressing who I am and what I understand' there exists a continuous strand that has remained unbroken from *Camera Work* to *CameraArts*.

But if the strand has remained continuous, the quality of the art photography produced has not. Few observers of the contemporary art photography scene would dispute, I think, the assertion that the work produced in the past fifteen years has neither the quality nor the authority of that of photographic modernism's heroic period, a period whose simultaneous apogee and rupture might be located in the work of Robert Frank. Too, it seems clear that the obsequies·for the so-called photography boom may have something to do with the general state of exhaustion, academicism and repetition evident in so much art photography as much as with the collapse of an over-extended market.[5]

The oracular pronouncements of Evans, Stieglitz, Strand, or Weston often have a portentous or even pompous ring, but the conviction that underlay them was validated by the vitality and authority of the modernism they espoused. To the extent that a modernist aesthetic retained legitimacy, credibility, and most importantly, function as the vessel and agent of advanced art, it permitted for the production of a corpus of great, now canonical, photography. The eclipse – or collapse, as the case may be – of modernism is coincident with art photography's final and triumphant vindication, its wholesale and unqualified acceptance into all the institutional precincts of fine art: museum, gallery, university, and art history.[6] The conditions surrounding and determining art photography production were now, of course, substantially altered. No' longer in an adversarial position, but in a state of parity with the traditional fine arts, two significant tendencies emerged by the early 1960s. One was the appearance of photography – typically appropriated from the mass media – in the work of artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol as well as its increased deployment by a group of conceptual artists such as John Baldessari. The second tendency was a pronounced academicisation of art photography both in a literal sense (photographers trained in art school and universities, the conferring of graduate degrees in photography) and in a stylistic sense: that is to say, the retrieval and/or reworking of photographic strategies now both fully conventionalised and formulaic, derived from the image bank of modernist photography, or even from modernist painting, and producing a kind of neo-pictorialist hybrid.

What was – and is – important about the two types of photographic practice was the distinct and explicit opposition built into these different uses. For the art photographer, the issues and intentions remained those traditionally associated with the aestheticising use and forms of the medium: the primacy of formal organisation and values, the autonomy of the photographic image, the subjectivisation of vision, the fetishising of print quality, and the unquestioned assumption of photographic authorship. In direct contrast, the artists who began to employ photography did so in the service of vastly different ends. More often than not, photography figured in their works in its most ubiquitous and normative incarnations. Thus, it was conscripted as a readymade image from either advertising or the mass media in its various and sundry manifestations in the quotidian visual environment, or alternatively, employed in its

[5] See Carol Squiers' discussion, 'Photography: Tradition and Decline', *Aperture* *91*, Summer, 1983, pp 72-76.

[6] An examination of these two related phenomena may be found in Douglas Crimp's 'The Museum's Old, The Library's New Subject', *Parachute* *22*, Spring, 1981, pp 32-37.

purely transcriptive and documentary capacities. In this latter usage, it did service to record site specific works, objects or events that had been orchestrated, constructed or arranged to be constituted anew, preserved, and represented in the camera image.

It is from this wellspring that the most interesting and provocative new work in photography has tended to come. Although this relatively recent outpouring of art production utilising photography covers a broad spectrum of concerns, intentions, and widely differing formal strategies, the common denominator is its collective resistance to any type of formal analysis, psychological interpretation, or aesthetic reading. Consistent with the general tenor of postmodern practice, such work takes as its point of departure not the hermetic enclave of aesthetic self-referencing (art about art, photography about photography), but rather, the social and cultural world of which it is a part. Thus, if one of the major claims of modernist art theory was the insistence on the autonomy and purity of the work of art, postmodern practice hinges on the assertion of contingency and the primacy of cultural codes. It follows that a significant proportion of postmodern art based on photographic usages is animated by a critical, or, if one prefers, deconstructive impulse. The intention of such work is less about provoking feeling, than provoking thought.

In addition to the work of Sherrie Levine with which this paper opened, I would like briefly to consider here the work of four other artists who may be seen as having a shared agenda, albeit with different inflections and emphases. Appropriators all, their work nonetheless ranges from entirely unmediated confiscation, as in the case of Levine, to the recropped, repositioned assemblages of Vikky Alexander and Silvia Kolbowski, to the composed texts superimposed over Barbara Kruger's purloined images, to the heroicised fragments of glossy advertisements that Richard Prince isolates and reshoots.

What gives their work its integrity, its cutting edge, is the common enterprise of 'making the invisible visible' – a goal whose strategies are now determined by a new arena: the world of mass produced images themselves. In contrast with many of the art movements of the earlier part of the century which promised liberation, the unshackling of vision and perception, these artists are clearly more modest in their goals, more pessimistic in what they conceive of as possible in what Guy Debord termed 'The Society of the Spectacle'. Nonetheless, in compelling a conscious reading of the ideology inscribed in various photographic uses, and in investing strategies that unravel their connotational structures, these artists may be seen as continuing that tradition of art making which views as its mission the unmasking of appearance by revealing its codes.

In the case of Richard Prince the dialectical, and hence, deconstructive readings effected by Levine's tactics, are arrived at by somewhat different means. Taking as his object of inquiry the highly mediated and technologically sophisticated advertising image, Prince has progressively sought to counter the manipulated and often synthetically composed advertising image with a comparable degree of simulation in his
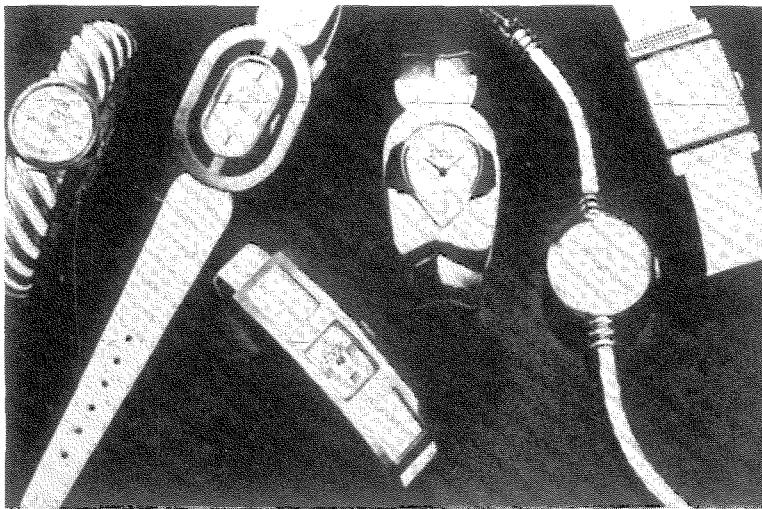
own appropriations. In this sense, Kate Linker has proposed[7] that the theoretical model for Prince's practice be located in Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum, which surpasses representation and reproduction, and instead produces a synthetic 'hyperreality', a 'real without origin or reality'. Much of the power of Prince's work derives from his ability to make the concept of the commodity fetish at once concrete and visible. The hyped-up, almost hallucinatory quality of his details of cigarette ads, expensive watches, shimmering whiskey logos, *et al*, are made to reveal their own strategies of overdetermination. There is an obsessional quality about Prince's work which has little to do with irony (and its attendant aspect of distancing) that informs much appropriative practice. The element of nightmare that subtly attaches itself to the erotic glitter and voluptuousness of the commodity (or the ambiance of the commodity) is similar in idea to the traditional Christian emblem of Luxuria – the head of a beautiful woman merging into the body of a serpent. Prince's rejection of traditional notions of authorship, while less programmatic than Levine's, have nonetheless originated in a comparable understanding of the conditions of spectacular society. Prince has quite precisely described his relation to authorship (as well as his own working method) in the following text:

His way to make it new was to make it again ... and making it again was enough for him and certainly, personally speaking, 'almost him'.[8]

The notion of identity as 'almost him' functions as an analogue to a fully conventionalised reality composed of images or simulacra; reality can no more be located in the world than 'authenticity' in the author.

For Silvia Kolbowski and Vikky Alexander the nature of their appropriations, and the operations they make upon them, mark their concerns as more centrally located within feminist discourse. Informed by aspects of psychoanalytic, linguistic, and feminist theory, Kolbowski's *Model Pleasure*, composed of seven discrete but integrally related

Richard Prince, Untitled, 1977-1979. Courtesy Metro Pictures, New York.

[7] Kate Linker, 'On Richard Prince's Photographs', *Arts Magazine*, November 1982, pp 121-123.

[8] Richard Prince, *Why I Go to the Movies Alone*, forthcoming.
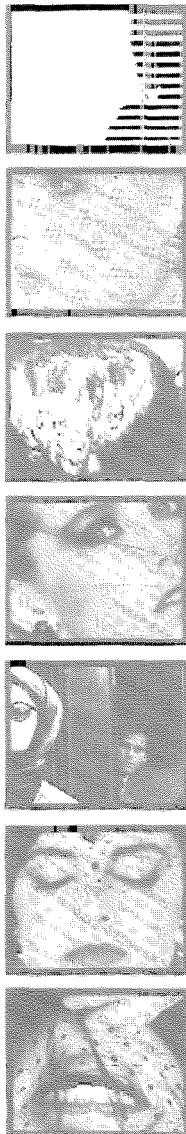
images, brackets cropped close-ups of five veiled models, with a woman 'veiled' behind venetian blinds, and a single shot of a man looking at a woman 'veiled' by dark glasses. Through appropriations, cropping, positioning and serial organisation, Kolbowski contrives a critical reading of the fashion image calculated to rupture the fictions of such representation. Voyeurism depicted within the series is counterpointed with the spectator's, a strategy that illumines the larger ideological system in which the construction of the female (as different, as Other) inevitably relegates her to the object of the gaze (which is always male) rather than permitting her to be the origin of it. When the image of the woman is presented for woman (as is generally the case with fashion photography) the female viewer must inescapably project her own sexual identity within this narcissistic cul-de-sac of being-looked-at, and hence existing by and for the eyes of men. Similarly, the constellation of sexual mythologies – women as enigma, as mystery – that are integrally bound with objectification and oppression are literally demonstrated in Kolbowski's orchestration of images. The final image – a woman's veiled and smiling mouth, brushed by a male hand – is placed upside down, in order, as Kolbowski explains, 'to make an analogy between the feminine gaze and the woman spoken'. For central to feminist theory is the recognition that woman does not speak herself; rather, she is spoken for and all that that implies: looked at, imaged, mystified and objectified.

Like Kolbowski's, Vikky Alexander's work of the past few years is grounded in a feminist critique of fashion imagery, the ideological terrain in which women are presented not only as ritual objects, but as commodities. Alexander has set herself the conceptual problem of rhetorically re-presenting the given image in such a way that its hidden codes are made legible. Through relatively subtle interventions in the original image (cropping in such a way that the ritualised aspects of pose or 'look' are thereby accentuated), by repetition and/or format (diptych, triptych, etc), Alexander compels awareness of not only the codes themselves, but the way they function.

In *Ecstasy*, three identical fashion photographs of a female model alone are alternated with two identical ones depicting a male and female model together. Part of the wit of the piece resides in its play with the

Above, Sylvia Kolbowski, Model Pleasure II, 1982. Right, Vikky Alexander, Ecstasy, 1983 (detail).
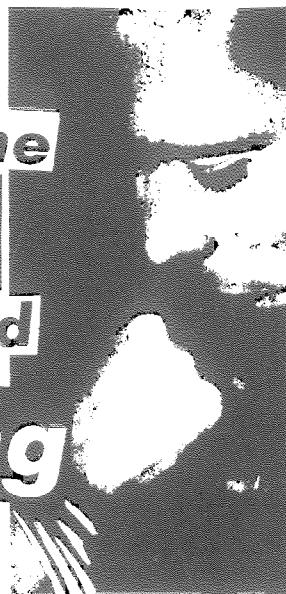
notion of quotation itself – as it functions in language as well as tactic- ally – as an artmaking strategy. For in the very act of describing such imagery in language, we must have recourse to the use of quotes in order to indicate its various levels of simulation. Accordingly, we would begin by noting that all the female models display an 'ecstatic' expression. Certainly not the expression of Bernini's St. Teresa, or Titian's Mary Magdalene, but a more up-to-date version: the conventionalised ecstasy which has emerged recently in fashion photography; closed, shiny eyelids, wet, slightly opened mouth. We would then go on to note that the couple are 'making love'. The quotational act by which the work has been constructed is thereby made to illustrate and expose the highly mediated simulation of the images' content. The inclusion of the single model – equally 'ecstatic' – insures our understanding that the depicted ecstasy, no less than the depiction of the women themselves, is a spec- tacle. Further, the spectacle of the ecstatic woman is intimately bound with representational structures of voyeurism, narcissism and power. By de-naturing such images, Alexander unmasks them.

Barbara Kruger's work – aggressive, graphic and occasionally almost brutal – appropriates not only the images themselves, but the 'look', address, and discursive mode of certain types of mass media institutions (the tabloid press, the billboard, the poster). Kruger's *modus operandi* consists of canny table-turning, whereby all the communicative tools in the arsenal of power are deployed against themselves. Appropriating the disembodied voice of patriarchal authority (expressed in bold face type), Kruger then makes superimpositions against found images (usually crude, rather anonymous looking ones) that are made to double back against themselves. Very rarely, this is effected by having the image in some sense contradict the text. For example, a narrowly cropped image

of a man kissing the hand of an (unseen) woman is emblazoned with the text 'You reenact the dance of insertion and wounding' with 'dance of' and 'wounding' in larger, differentiated typeface. More typically, however, the juxtaposition of Kruger's composed texts and found images creates new and subversive meanings for both. Thus, utilising a thoroughly stereotypical image conventionally signifying mother love – the tiny baby hand clutching the mother's finger – Kruger distills a far more trenchant observation; 'Your every wish [in small type face over the two hands] is our command.' Roland Barthes' concept of caption and text functioning as anchorage and relay is nowhere more eloquently demonstrated than in Kruger's iconic/lexographic sleight-of-hands. Much of her work is extremely witty (a group of formally dressed men laughingly giving one of their number a 'going over' is captioned, 'You construct intricate rituals which allow you to touch the skin of other men'), a strategy as capable of critical analysis as any other.

Differences in emphasis, tactics and degree of appropriation notwithstanding, Alexander, Kolbowski, Kruger, Levine and Prince are artists whose concerns are grounded in the cultural, the political, the sexual. Viewed individually, collectively, or as sample representatives of postmodernist art practice, their work contrasts vividly with the parochialism, insularity, and conservatism of much art photography.

The title of this paper – winning the game when the rules have been changed – relates to precisely this phenomenon. Having achieved institutional legitimation as a fine art among the others, art photography remains rooted in a conceptual impasse of its own making. Most art photographers, particularly those established within the past fifteen years or so, and now ensconced within the photography departments across the land, give little thought to the general collapse of the modernism which provided the ballast for the triumphant rise of art photography. The teaching of photography tends to be cordoned off from what goes on in the rest of the art department. So while young painters are reading art magazines and often as not following to some degree developments in film, performance or video, photography students are reading photography magazines, disputing the merits of documentary mode over self expression, or resurrecting onto the fourth generation an exhausted formalism that can no longer generate either heat or light.

Often the reaction of art photographers to postmodernist photographic work is bafflement, if not a sense of affront. The irony is that photography, a medium which by its very nature is so utterly bound to the world and its objects, should have had, in a variety of ways, to divorce itself from this primary relationship in order to claim for itself a photographic aesthetics.